University Convocation
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
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“Restoring the ‘Uni’ in University”

Philip L. Dubois
Chancellor

Good morning, and welcome to the beginning of the 2013-2014 academic year at UNC Charlotte. This is the ninth University Convocation over which I have presided since Lisa and I returned to Charlotte in 2005. And, I am happy to report that, notwithstanding some daunting challenges, my report this year will sound a lot like the previous eight. This institution is on a roll.

The annual University Convocation was developed in the early 1990s and it remains true to its original purpose: to provide the University community with an opportunity to learn about what’s been going on at the University over the past year and, more importantly, to hear about the planned activities and challenges of the year ahead. For those of you who may be new to UNC Charlotte, you can also find a wealth of information in the Chancellor’s Outbox on our website (http://administration.uncc.edu/chancellor/chancellors-outbox). And if you have just tired of all of the boring information that is available on television, Netflix, Facebook, Google, and Twitter, you can also consult the Chancellor’s Outbox to view past video editions of my “State of the University” addresses over the past several years. And while you are doing that, consider the sorry state of your life that you would turn to Phil Dubois for entertainment!

I won’t spend too much time this morning focused on achievements over the past year, but all of you have worked hard and much has been accomplished. My mom always said that a pat on the back is much better than a kick in the rear, so we’ll start high and work our way down.

Enrollment at the University continues to grow. Last fall’s enrollment of 26,232 was an all-time high, and our enrollment of undergraduates moved us to third place in the UNC system in that category of students. This fall’s enrollment may very well top last year’s, and we continue to see large increases in applications from prospective freshmen and transfer students. Indeed, among freshmen, completed applications have increased 64% since 2005; among transfers, applications have increased about 60%. And the academic qualifications of the students we’ve admitted and who have enrolled continues to improve. Our incoming class of freshmen this fall arrive with weighted high school GPAs of over 3.8.

As we have weathered through the economic recession, we have had to address the painful reality of teaching more students with fewer resources. And there is no question that this
reality has made us more efficient, spending 8.2% less per degree produced in 2011-12 than we did just five years earlier. During the same time, we increased our production of degrees by 18% and by 24% if we include the 2012-13 graduating class. No one needs to lecture the faculty and staff at UNC Charlotte about doing more with less. We’ve been there; we’ve done that. Indeed, combining our enrollment growth, improved retention, and degree production, it is likely that we will be adding a third commencement ceremony in May of 2014.

As the economy begins to regain some of its strength but while state resources for higher education remain constrained, I thought that this past year would be a good time to re-examine our long range enrollment plan. That judgment was rewarded serendipitously by the Board of Governors’ decision in February to set a goal of increasing the percentage of state residents with a bachelor’s degree from its current level of 26% to the level of 32% by 2018 and to 37% by 2025. For the Board of Governors and the State of North Carolina to achieve these ambitious attainment goals, it is impossible to imagine any growth scenario that does not include UNC Charlotte.

So, this past spring, we asked Tina McEntire, our Associate Provost of Enrollment Management, to lead a task force to assess future demand for admission to UNC Charlotte as a first step in our determining how much of that demand we might be able to serve.

Some of you will recall that, early in 2006, a similar exercise led by Provost Lorden concluded that we might achieve 35,000 students by the year 2020. As the recession took hold, we slowed that rate of growth. But the work of the McEntire group makes it clear that there is little we can do to stem the rising tide of demand for higher education in this region. Projections are always uncertain, but we think the pattern of increasing numbers of completed applications, estimates of high school graduation rates, increasing enrollments at the community college, and population growth in the state and the greater Charlotte region mean that the original estimate of a University enrollment of 35,000 is still reasonable.

What is not reasonable is to attempt to maintain the pace of enrollment growth we have had in the past without adequate resources. Although it is true that the General Assembly funded our enrollment growth with $6.9 million in additional funding this fall, we also expect $6.6 million in budget reductions, including legislatively-imposed budget cuts for increasing academic and operational efficiencies, and small additional reductions imposed by the Board of Governors to help them fund the system’s new set of strategic initiatives.

What helps us deal with new students, of course, is that all students pay tuition, now the source of approximately 40 cents of every dollar we spend on instruction and academic support. So, you can do the math. If we are to preserve access for qualified students while maintaining the quality of our academic and administrative support systems, we have to strike a balance.

Moreover, as we go forward, we need to be mindful not only of the students coming through the door but also those walking across the stage to receive their degrees. Funding decisions within the UNC system are gradually shifting away from rewarding enrollment growth alone to “performance-based” systems that track students’ timely degree completion and graduation rates.
So, beginning with the fall of 2014, we will authorize the Undergraduate Admissions Office to enroll up to 125 new freshmen each year over the approximately 3,120 freshmen we expect this fall. If that target is reached, our freshman growth rate would be just about 4%. However, one of the things we will also ask Admissions to do is to maintain high academic standards for that entering class so that we can maximize the chances for success with respect to retention and degree completion. Although students’ academic preparation is not the only determinant of student success, it is a major consideration.

At this time, we will maintain and not increase our current enrollment of transfer students, even though demand from that group of students is expected to increase at rates even faster than freshman growth. This will not diminish our historic commitment to transfer students, particularly those coming from North Carolina community colleges. UNC Charlotte began as a two-year institution and we have considered our status as the leading transfer institution in the UNC system to be a point of pride in support of our goal of providing an accessible and affordable college education to all qualified students. But we now understand that the ability of transfer students to complete their degrees at the University has a lot to do with whether they have completed their associate’s degrees before arriving in our classrooms. We want to spend some time this year thinking about the implications of changing our approach to the admission of transfer students so as to maximize their chances of success at the University, and of course we want to do that in full collaboration with our community college partners.

We also see a major opportunity to strengthen our graduate programs at both the master’s and doctoral levels, and we have allocated significant resources to marketing those programs this past year and have seen good results. I have asked Graduate Dean Tom Reynolds to initiate a graduate enrollment planning process this year so we can identify specific programs which have the ability and capacity to serve additional students.

Our goal to build a major research university here simply cannot happen without significant expansion in the number, scope, and size of our graduate programs, particularly at the doctoral level. For that reason, we will maintain our long-term goal of having 25% of our headcount enrollment consist of graduate students. Tom’s work will also include a re-examination of our strategy for funding graduate student support.

For both undergraduate and graduate student recruitment and retention, we will also move aggressively this year to address a problem we have come to understand much better over the past year—a broken scholarship administration process. The most visible indicator of the problems confronting us in scholarship administration was that we have not been allocating to students all of the funds we actually have available for scholarship support. Another smaller but significant portion of our funds were “un-awardable” as a result of narrow restrictions in donor agreements with respect to student eligibility.

With students in need of financial support more than ever, this is simply an intolerable situation. It impairs our ability to recruit and retain the best students, makes for poor stewardship of donated funds, confounds college and departmental administrators, and is confusing to our students and their parents.
Again, under the leadership of Tina McEntire and a team of thoughtful staff from across the University, we think we now have a good understanding of how this situation has come to be and what it will take to fix it. Accordingly, in the upcoming budget year, I will be allocating funds to support the staffing of a centralized University Scholarship Office and the acquisition of the necessary technology and enterprise software system necessary to completely re-engineer our scholarship administration process. A University Scholarship Office will improve our ability to be better stewards of the funds entrusted to us by donors and permit us to strategically allocate financial resources to new students who can be retained and earn their degrees.

As new students arrive at UNC Charlotte, we continue to expand our inventory of new academic programs, while divesting ourselves of those programs that have outlived their usefulness or for which demand has waned. Over the last couple of years, we have added a new bachelor’s program in Neurodiagnostics and Sleep Science and new minors, while many other programs were revised or restructured. At the master’s level, we have a new professional science masters degree (PSM) in Health Informatics and an M.S. in Real Estate.

Earlier this year we received approval for the doctoral program in Nursing Practice and, just a week and a half ago, the Board of Governors approved our 21st doctoral program, the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences, moving us closer our goal of creating the second School of Public Health in the State of North Carolina. We will also hope that we can obtain approval this year of two new important degree programs—a master’s degree in applied energy and electromechanical systems, and a professional science master’s program in data science and business analytics (DSBA). Both of these programs related to our academic initiatives in energy and big data, respectively, that have high potential for strengthening economic development and job creation in the region. We will also move forward to develop a proposal for our 22nd doctoral degree, a Ph.D. in Research, Measurement, and Evaluation within the College of Education. Given existing coursework already available on campus that would support such a degree offering, we think we can offer a high demand degree at virtually no incremental cost.

While our faculty and staff were working hard to deliver these programs, teach and advise our students, their productive research and creative activities continue to amaze. From the research work of Professor Kim Jones in the College of Arts + Architecture to reanimate an original dance composed by Martha Graham to the formation of two additional University/Industry Cooperative Research Centers (bringing our total to six), our faculty members continue to move the leading edges of scholarly accomplishment at UNC Charlotte with dozens of published books and peer-reviewed articles and abstracts. Our research funded by government and industry sources reached levels last seen in 2009 in terms of new awards and annual expenditures. Our faculty were also awarded 16 patents and we completed 19 licensing agreements to move our research results into the marketplace of ideas and inventions. Work led by Vice Chancellor for Research Bob Wilhelm and Ventureprise Director Paul Wetenhall continues to provide important support for entrepreneurs and incubating small businesses.

Looking ahead this year, we will move forward to implement most parts of the Strategic Plan for Research Growth developed by Vice Chancellor Wilhelm in consultation with the academic deans and various faculty groups. That plan is designed to move us toward my goal of having UNC Charlotte secure sustainable external research funding of $50 million annually by the year 2020. The Strategic
Plan seeks the further integration of the old Office of Research and Federal Relations with the Charlotte Research Institute, focusing resources and infrastructure upon a finite number of high potential research areas, and improving services and support for faculty as they pursue new research efforts and develop as nationally prominent scholars, including a new effort to support social science research. With specific reference to the development of high potential research areas, I intend a major investment this year to develop our academic and technical staff capacity to support our emerging program in Data Science and Business Analytics (DSBA).

We will also continue the important initiative known as Advancing University Research Administration (AURA), a project initially launched in 2009 to streamline research administration. Results to date include improved financial reporting, user-friendly systems for hiring under grants, and a new training program for departmental administrators. Project information for AURA can be found on its Moodle site at: https://moodle.uncc.edu/course/view.php?id=114398&edit=off&sesskey=vm01N3o3YJ.

With the growth of the campus’ enrollment, our academic programs, and our research has come the need to build new facilities and renovate older ones. And these physical changes will continue this year. We opened two new residence halls this fall, including Hunt Hall in the South Village and Belk Hall in the North Village. A new 1,247-space parking deck will serve the students in South Village for many years to come. A new dining and student community complex in South Village is also well underway and should be open for business in fall, 2014. Martin Village, now demolished, is being replaced by Martin Hall in the East Village. With the completion of Alumni Way and the addition of our fifth stop light at the Harris Alumni Center, it is now possible to circumnavigate the campus without having to leave the campus. Hechenbleikner Lake has been restored and I look forward to the Chancellor’s Catch and Release Fishing Derby once we have stocked the lake.

On the far west side of campus, the new industry research partnership facility (known as PORTAL) will be ready for business in February. A new 1,344-space parking deck to serve the CRI campus and the crowds we expect for football has also opened.

Many of our older campus buildings have also received attention this past year and we expect to dedicate approximately $3 million this coming year to renovate academic and administrative areas to create productive, functional, and inviting spaces on campus for learning and research.

For example, seven classrooms in Denny received a much needed facelift last year, and we will continue to update remaining classrooms in Denny. We are also in the process of designing a collaborative classroom that will be housed in Kennedy. You may also have noticed our students congregating in the beautiful, collaborative study space that opened last year on the bottom floor of the Atkins library. Last year, renovations in Friday, Rowe, Storrs, and Robinson provided improved space to the students in the Belk College of Business and the College of Arts + Architecture. This year, departmental space in Engineering Technology in the Smith Building is being renovated. Planning is also underway to renovate Kinesiology department space in the Belk Gym.
Additional spaces will be created to facilitate student success on campus, including the Belk College of Business’s new Student Center for Professional Development in the Friday building, and the consolidation of the University Center for Academic Excellence, Multicultural Academic Services, and the Undergraduate Advising Center in Colvard to create a comprehensive area for student success.

Finally, we are upgrading high performance computer server rooms and research laboratories in Woodward, Colvard, and the Burson Building. Burson is also the focus of a major study of what renovations will be possible to make those laboratories more modern and functional in the absence of new state funding to plan and build the major science facility that has been our top capital construction priority for several years.

In terms of additional construction activity, this year will see some new projects started but they would have to be considered modest in comparison to the last several years. Working with the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the City of Charlotte, we are developing a pedestrian path along University City Blvd. from John Kirk Blvd. on the north to Harris Blvd. on the south. We are trying to improve safety along the South Entrance to the University with a new pedestrian walkway that has already been completed from the Harris Alumni Center to the Chancellor’s Residence. Lisa and I hope you’ll keep on going and not stop at Bissell House for hors d’oeuvres, so the rest of the sidewalk that will take you out to University City Blvd. will be completed in the coming year. And although we don’t control the construction schedule, we can expect to see some signs of construction of the new light rail line that will begin to serve the campus in 2017.

Of course, a University is much more than just its brick and mortar. Its fundamental DNA consists of the mental and physical energy of its faculty and staff.

In terms of the general condition of our faculty and staff, I am glad to report that we continue to see an engaged, committed, and collaborative academic community at UNC Charlotte. As we have filled positions vacated for one reason or another, we have also been able to recruit excellent people who bring energy and enthusiasm to our institution. But, as the economic recovery has taken hold, we are seeing increasing raids on our talent pool by other institutions and the private sector. That is why it was especially disappointing to see the General Assembly not approve any salary increases for this upcoming biennium, although it is possible that something in this area may be done in the 2014 legislative session if economic conditions permit.

What this means, of course, is that most of our classified SPA staff have seen only one legislatively-authorized pay raise in the past five years, and that was the modest 1.2% raise in 2012. Our EPA non-faculty and faculty employees have been placed in much the same position, with just a 3% overall increase in our salary pool in 2012. Obviously, although our employees have been very patient, salary increases are necessary to maintain morale and to minimize departures.

With that said, I do think we have done a good job overall of using our limited resources to support our people. For our SPA employees, we have allocated $4.3 million over the past five years to four separate strategic salary initiatives to ensure that career banding had some tangible
meaning and to make sure that we were paying market-based salaries. As of today, 83% of our SPA employees are paid at or above their respective market-reference rates. We know of no other campus that has done more for SPA employees in this regard.

We still have issues with respect to the adequacy of the salaries paid non-faculty EPA employees, although we made some progress on their salary issues in the last raise cycle. Where we have a particularly compelling need is the adequacy of our salaries for those full-time faculty who were hired many years ago and who have been in their current rank since the worst years of the recession. Our current salaries compare well to the average salaries paid in other doctoral-granting institutions and even to our Board of Governors peers. But our long-term goal, and one which was endorsed by the Board of Governors years ago to ensure that we were able to hire the best talent and to fend off competitors, was to have our salaries meet or exceed the 80th percentile of average salaries in doctoral-granting institutions. We have a deficiency there against that benchmark, and we have some colleges significantly below it.

Therefore, working with the Provost and the Deans this year, we will fund some kind of strategic salary initiative for the faculty to address issues related to salary compression, equity, and retention. As we take on this issue, it is important for everyone to understand that the most-recent legislative session resulted in limitations with respect to salary administration and, as a result, we are prohibited from increasing salaries simply to reward merit or to respond to market changes. The legislature did, however, authorize us to address equity and retention issues, and we intend to do that. We will also complete a salary study for our EPA non-faculty salaries, so we can better understand any issues we might have there and devise a plan to address salary inequities. The Provost and I also agree that, as a matter of fairness, we need to address the very low salaries paid our part-time faculty, the vast majority of whom teach in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Over time, of course, we hope the state economy improves sufficiently and our political case strengthens to restore regular salary increases and capital appropriations as part of the University’s budget. Although the President and the General Administration manage the system’s political relations, UNC Charlotte is certainly doing its part to build a broad base of support in this region by engaging the business community, alumni, and friends in regular discussions about the importance of the University to the future of this region. Led by the Chancellor’s Special Assistant for Constituent Relations, Betty Doster, our program of visiting with community leaders, alumni, media, and elected officials in our neighboring counties will continue this year with visits to Iredell and Stanly counties, and an expanded set of visits within Mecklenburg County.

Although it is nearly impossible to measure the impact of the process of building support among external constituents, we do have some evidence that our various efforts, including our communications strategy lead by Stephen Ward and his colleagues, are making a difference. When our own Urban Institute asked Mecklenburg County residents this past year to rate UNC Charlotte’s value to the Charlotte community, over 50% said “excellent” and 20% said “above average.” In fact, the percentage saying “excellent” has jumped 20 percentage points from just two years ago.
The campus was also honored over the past eighteen months with important community awards, including the Creative Thinker’s Award from the Carolinas Chapter of the Counselors of Real Estate for the creation of the Center City Building, the Charlotte Cornerstone Award from the Charlotte Region Commercial Board of Realtors for the positive community impact of our facilities development, and the Energy Leadership Award of the Charlotte Business Journal for our EPIC initiative. Charlotte seems to have noticed we’re here and it’s not all about football.

Along with building political support from the public sector, we will also continue to build financial support from the private sector and our alumni. Our overall private fundraising reached $30.6 million this past year, including major gifts from Belk, Inc., and Mr. Jerry Richardson. Having set this year a new record for private fundraising, we intend to use this coming year to position the University to launch our first comprehensive fundraising campaign since the “It Takes a Gift” campaign closed at the end of Chancellor Woodward’s tenure in mid-2005. Part of this positioning process will include the development of strong case statements by the University and our academic colleges, an external study to analyze the sentiments of our donors and friends, building staff capacity to support a campaign, and creation of a supportive communications strategy. We don’t yet have a formal campaign goal, but my expectation is that it will be in excess of $200 million over five years, beginning with a silent leadership phase in July of 2014.

My remarks today have yet to hit upon the theme implied by the title of my remarks this “Restoring the ‘Uni’ in University.” So, here is what I’m thinking about.

If you conduct a Google search on the web, you’ll find that institutions as significant as The Ohio State University and Johns Hopkins have been working on the theme of “One University” to break down the highly specialized academic silos that have come to characterize American higher education in some measure. As one wag once observed, “the world has problems, but the universities have departments.”

At UNC Charlotte, we have long understood that our integrated whole is greater than the sum of our parts. We have had a long tradition of working across disciplinary boundaries to serve the needs of our region and state with applied research of relevance and import. Many of our undergraduate and graduate programs—and certainly the overall disposition of our faculty—reflect this understanding. In fact, as UNC Charlotte’s provost twenty years ago, I endorsed a broad interdisciplinary program in applied and professional ethics that survives to this day. Our current initiative in helping a diverse range of economic sectors—from financial services to retail to health care to energy (and many others)—to harness the power of “big data” is the latest example.

I think we now need to take this spirit into our administration and how we relate to all of our internal and external constituents, but especially our students and their parents. Every action that we take, from a divisional or college or unit level down to the actions of our individual employees, reflects on the whole. When a student or their parents get a problem passed from one administrative office to the next, that can easily color their view of UNC Charlotte. That negative view may not only be shared with others, but it can certainly prevent our development and alumni staffs from building a relationship with that future alumnus. So just as the principles that guide our administration (http://administration.uncc.edu/internal-administrative-operating-
principles-and-values-0) include collaboration, consultation, transparency, and close attention to effective execution, we must now work to restore the “Uni” in “University.” We all share the blame for a bad experience, and we all should share in the credit when we get it right.

So, as we approach our administrative work every day, I hope we’ll begin to think about how our processes and procedures, but most especially our attitude, can reflect the desire to solve problems rather than pass them along. We all know that when we call our bank, deal with a retailer, try to resolve a health care bill, or otherwise deal with a customer service representative, we expect that person to solve our problem. In my view, we should adopt the same institutional posture.

We also need to reflect our status as a single “University” in our institutional publications and messaging. We have made tremendous progress on this issue through our web redesign process. And while I can appreciate the pride that our individual colleges, departments, administrative service units, and research institutes take in their work, the result is a dizzying array of on-line and hard copy publications, logos, sub-brand messaging, and the like. Our various colleges and administrative units house nearly 30 individual employees dedicated to communications and external relations, in addition to our central communications staff. At the same time that we attempt to reach the specialized constituencies served throughout the University, we also need to be cognizant of the amount, coherence, and timing of what we are saying to the external world.

Finally, beyond communications, our work as a “University” needs to be rationalized when it comes to critical aspects of our infrastructure, and in no area is this more critical than that of information technology. Many of you know that, about 19 months ago, we suffered a critical security breach. That breach was not only the result of human error, but it was the result of about two decades of highly decentralized growth and oversight of our information technology capacity. The breach was not only expensive in financial terms, but it subjected us to a significant reputational risk.

So, early in 2013, we embarked on a comprehensive master planning process for information technology across campus. Working with consultants BerryDunn, a steering committee, and more than two hundred campus community members, we have defined the current state of our information technology infrastructure and benchmarked it against institutional peers. This summer, we identified nine key areas where improvement can be made in the ways in which we as a campus define, deliver, and fund information technology. These areas include Communication and Leadership, Effective Utilization of Enterprise Systems, Infrastructure, Security, Budgeting and Expenditures, Governance and Planning, Service Delivery Model, and Service Portfolio and Project Management. Earlier this month, we convened teams to analyze each area and recommend improvements that can be introduced over the five-year span of the master plan.

The kinds of changes we need to make to put the “Uni” back into “University” will require dedication, persistence, and some sacrifice of decentralized interests for the sake of the whole. But these changes can be made, and it should not take forever to accomplish them. I heard it said recently that higher education institutions are not built for change and that it occurs only one funeral at a time. Well, I’m not volunteering for the funeral!
Acting as a single institution with a unified sense of purpose and patience will be especially important as we embark on the unique journey that is football in just about a week and a half from now. The addition of football brings many changes to the University beyond the Department of Athletics and adds new levels of complexity to many of our operations. These complexities will be felt particularly on home game days on Saturdays in the fall semester and, with our rise to Conference USA in 2015, could include a Thursday evening game now and again to accommodate television football schedules. In particular, football presents us with conflicts for scheduling a variety of other high value events on campus, including scheduled classes and laboratories, campus recruitment sessions, academic and non-academic conferences and speakers, various cultural events, and special events like International Festival. For that reason, we will move forward this year with the recommendations of the Integrated Scheduling Committee that has been led by my Chief of Staff, Krista Newkirk and do our very best to accommodate as many of the conflicting interests as we can. We’ll make necessary adjustments as we gain experience. But, in the end, the decision to have a football program was a “University” decision and we all need to work together to make it work. In the words of the Committee, let’s “keep calm and play some football.”

Finally, let me close with something I hope you might find modestly inspirational, particularly amidst the body of challenging work for the year ahead that I’ve placed before you this morning.

I have always felt that my college education made a world of difference for me personally. My parents never had the opportunity to attend college, although both of them had that aspiration. My father was a World War II veteran with benefits under the GI Bill, but he had to go to work right after the war to support my mother and my older brother, who was born in 1945 while my father was stationed in the Pacific. So, both my brother and I were encouraged from a young age to seek and attain higher education, and strangely enough we both ended up with doctoral degrees.

Over the years, perhaps I have taken for granted the fact that my brother and I were first-generation college students. That might be surprising because I frequently tell external audiences that one of our educational challenges at UNC Charlotte is that a third of our students are first-generation college students and that these students often lack clear role models in their immediate families.

But I was recently reminded about the enduring value of a college degree for so many students when I heard Alecia Page of Earl, North Carolina, as she addressed the Board of Governors at its last meeting in Chapel Hill. Alecia is a 2013 graduate of Western Carolina University with a degree in English and served that institution as its Student Body President, and now serves UNC President Tom Ross as one of three presidential interns in the General Administration. Alecia first observed that she had earned a bachelor’s degree in English and had a job. But then she said something even more to the point of what we do here each and every day. “I feel about public higher education the way most people feel about gravity,” she said. “I tested it . . . and it works!”

Thank you very much, and good morning.