Good morning, and welcome to the beginning of the 2014-2015 academic year at UNC Charlotte. As many of you know, the annual University Convocation in its present form 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. Spoiler Alert!: Notwithstanding some challenges that I’ll talk about in a little while, this institution finds itself in a very good place.

It’s hard to believe that this is the tenth University Convocation over which I have presided since Lisa and I returned to Charlotte in 2005. And as I start my tenth year, I’m reminded of my first day in office—July 5, 2005. Lisa and I were relaxing on our screened porch at the Chancellor’s residence, Bissell House. Lisa had just given me a glass of vintage Cabernet after my first full day and told me to relax for a while until I would put some great steaks on the grill. Life was good. Suddenly, I was greeted by a genie who popped out of the wine bottle. And the genie told me that she would grant one of three wishes. Wow, I thought, this move to Charlotte is really working out! The genie first said that, if I wanted, I could be the world’s richest chancellor, with more than enough money to retire and to live a life of privilege and luxury. Or, alternatively, I could be the world's smartest and most insightful chancellor. Or, I could be the most youthful and best-looking chancellor. Three great wishes, but I would have to choose just one. Well, you only have one life, and it should be obvious to anyone here today and anyone watching our video stream that I chose to be the world's most youthful and best looking chancellor. Today, of course, as I enter my 10th year, it’s very clear—I should have taken the money!

Thank you, once again, for being here this morning. I consider this an important time for us to be together, not only to take stock of where we’ve been and to acknowledge our institutional and individual accomplishments, but also to map out the road for the coming year. I would encourage all of you to stay for the question and answer period that follows. All of us will
benefit to know what route we are taking, whether we are using GPS, following a street map, or looking for the bread crumbs.

I like to begin this address every year by pointing out some bright spots, before I get to the challenges and the work of the year ahead. So let me do that.

In today's highly competitive world of higher education where students have lots of choices, it is heartening to know that interest in UNC Charlotte continues to climb. Completed applications for freshman admission this fall reached 15,600, an 80% increase since 2005 and the third-highest in the UNC System. As a result of increased interest among both prospective freshmen and transfers, improved undergraduate student retention, and only modest declines in our graduate enrollment as a result of state policy changes in the field of education, we expect our overall fall semester enrollment to climb to approximately 27,000 students.

To put our enrollment growth in some perspective, from the fall of 2008 to the fall of 2013, of all of the enrollment growth in the 17-campus UNC System, UNC Charlotte was responsible for 48% of it. When the fall 2014 numbers are in, our market share may be even more impressive.

Our goal with all of these students, of course, is to send degree recipients out into the world of work as productive and engaged members of the community. We continue to do that very well, awarding 5,898 baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees last year. If the state of North Carolina is to achieve the statewide degree attainment goal of moving from 26% of the adult population with college degrees or better to 32% by 2018 and to 37% by 2025, it simply can't be done without the continuing and increasing contributions of UNC Charlotte. Truly, in the words of the title of the UNC System's strategic plan, it is "Our Time, Our Future."

Of course, as we educate these students, we seek to offer a gradually increasing array of programs to meet their needs and the demands of our society for an educated workforce. With support from President Tom Ross and the Board of Governors, we were pleased this last year to secure approval for our 21st doctoral degree, the Ph.D. in Public Health Sciences. We also added two regionally important master's degrees: the Professional Science Master's in Data Science and Business Analytics, and the Master's in Applied Energy and Electromechanical Systems. Two additional doctoral degree proposals have been submitted to the General Administration for planning approval: a Ph.D. in Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation, and a Doctor of Business Administration (D.B.A) degree.

In addition to our work with students in the classroom, the laboratory, and the studio, our faculty and research staff continue the important work of discovery and application—writing books, articles, and abstracts; securing external funding; and moving research discoveries into the commercial marketplace. We don't keep campus-wide numbers but I think you will get the idea when I tell you that the faculty in our largest college, Liberal Arts and Sciences, published more than 40 books and hundreds of articles this past year. Faculty in all of our colleges
contributed to securing external awards of more than $36 million and advancing our technology transfer efforts by filing 58 patents, securing 11 more awarded patents, and spinning off four start-up companies.

As we have gone about our important work, we have achieved an outstanding level of quality and significant numbers of external recognitions for the work of our faculty, staff, and students. The accolades are too numerous to mention here this morning, but I’ll share a few of the most notable examples:

- Staff member Steve Clark was recognized with the Governor’s Award for Excellence; what a way to retire from his position as Director of our Office of Classroom Support!

- Professor Johan Enslin, Director of our Energy Production and Infrastructure Center, was named an “Energy Leadership” award winner by the Charlotte Business Journal.

- Athletic Director Judy Rose was a national finalist for the Athletic Director of the Year by the Sports Business Journal.

- Even our Trustees got into the excellence act, as Trustee Theresa Drew was recognized by Leadership Charlotte as the Newcomer of the Year for her commitment to community engagement.

- And we can’t forget our wonderful students: the Solar Decathlon Team who captured the “People’s Choice Award” for their energy efficient masterpiece in facility design, “Urban Eden,” and

- The Lee College of Engineering students who won the first place award for “Best Vehicle Design” in NASA’s national aerospace competition.

Institutional recognitions have also made the trophy case a little more crowded:

- The Charlotte Chamber awarded its Belk Innovation in Diversity Award to UNC Charlotte, the first time a non-profit organization has been so recognized.

- North Carolina Campus Compact recognized us with its Engaged Leadership Award.

- For our work at the time of the Democratic National Convention in 2012, the Washington Center has recognized us as its “New Affiliate of the Year.”

- Later this fall, representatives from UNC Charlotte will accept separate recognitions by national organizations for excellence in facilities management and best practices in human resources.
• In one of many examples of collaborative efforts from across the University, a team of students and staff will soon accept the National Association of College Auxiliary Services' 2014 Innovative Achievement Award for the Zero Waste program that was initiated in our first football season at Jerry Richardson Stadium.

• And, again as a result of a campus-wide effort, we completed our first football year by being ranked #1 in a national survey of the quality of the game day experience.

Taken as a whole, these recognitions contribute to increasing public regard for the work of this institution. In the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute's annual survey of Mecklenburg County residents this past year, respondents were once again asked how they would rate the university's value to the Charlotte community. Over 50 percent answered with "excellent," the highest rating, an increase of 17 percentage points over the previous year. A combined total of 70.4 percent ranked our value to the community as above average or excellent.

And, in a more recent brand perception study carried out by an external consultant, UNC Charlotte alumni were asked their overall opinion of UNC Charlotte today. Sixty-one percent of respondents gave us the highest rating in this study. This was an increase of 37 percentage points from the 2007 study.

These public recognitions of excellence are terrific. But, if I may, let me make note of some things that the average person at UNC Charlotte might not know about but which are very important to the governance and health of our institution. Our bond ratings were reaffirmed this year by the two major bond rating houses. We had another year of squeaky-clean financial audits. We have been judged by the General Administration to have an almost perfect record when it comes to financial compliance in a variety of administrative areas. We’ve established and will soon fill the University’s first compliance officer position. We’ve established a new Scholarship Office to make sure that we don’t leave any privately-donated scholarship funds unawarded and not in the pockets of deserving and needy students. On the fundraising front, we’ve raised $26.4 million from alumni and friends. We’ve established a Communications Council to strengthen our messaging to both internal and external audiences. We’ve established the “Niner Choice” off-campus housing certification program so that students and parents can be assured that apartment complexes in the vicinity of the University meet key safety and security standards. We have taken the lessons of last year’s Budget Reexamination Group and are moving forward to see whether we have any untapped sources of revenue. We have reviewed and revised a long list of University policies to make them more understandable and effective. We have offered orientation and training sessions to the campus community, including our new employees, on a variety of topics to make it possible for the faculty and other staff to do their work more effectively.

The administrative staff members in all of our divisions who are responsible for these initiatives can easily go unnoticed, but their contributions have made this a much more solid institution. The administrative foundation of this institution is very strong.
Our physical plant is also outstanding and expanding. In just over a year, with leadership from Dr. Michele Howard in Academic Affairs and a host of hustling staff from across campus and especially in Facilities Management, we have put together and will open the Charlotte Engineering Early College on the Charlotte Research Institute campus adjacent to North Tryon Street (Highway 29) in collaboration with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. The first class of 100 high school freshmen will enter one of CMS’s most popular district-wide magnet schools next Monday morning, with 165 students remaining on a waiting list.

Over the past year, we have also made progress on a number of important facilities. Our industry partnership building, PORTAL, was dedicated in February. Other academic spaces and offices in Barnard, Burson, Colvard, Fretwell, Kennedy, and Woodward Hall have received needed updates and facelifts. And the long-awaited renovation of Belk Gym is underway to address the need for additional student exercise facilities as well as space for our expanding Kinesiology department.

We have also added residential space to accommodate our ever-growing student population. Governor Jim Hunt joined us last October to dedicate the attractive new 436-bed residence hall for freshmen, replacing the old Hunt Village on the south side of campus. The new dining commons for South Village residents, to be called South Village Crossing, will open in October. And just last week students occupied our new 404-bed apartment complex on the north side of campus, Martin Hall, replacing the old Martin Village which was fondly known by several generations of students as Smurf Village because of its blue exterior paint.

Besides the buildings—and most importantly—we continue to be served by outstanding faculty and staff. On that front, as you may have heard, the General Assembly’s recently-enacted budget for the coming year includes a $1,000 across-the-board increase for staff employees subject to the State Personnel Act (SPA). I do not consider that adequate, but it is certainly better than having another year go by with no compensation adjustments. Unfortunately, no raises were voted for faculty or employees exempt from the State Personnel Act (EPA). In consultation with my Cabinet, and subject to approval from UNC General Administration and the Board of Governors, I am hopeful that we will be able to match the SPA increase for all eligible faculty and EPA employees in the not too distant future.

Additionally, using campus resources, we will implement a long-planned adjustment for EPA non-faculty employees based on considerations of market and equity. As you may recall, over the past several years, we have made four strategic salary adjustments for SPA staff to ensure that career banding has had some tangible meaning and to make sure that we were paying market-based salaries. Similarly, last year we implemented a strategic salary adjustment for senior faculty whose salaries had been most compressed by the years of recession. This year, we will implement a similar strategy for our non-faculty EPA which, at a practical level, means that some EPA non-faculty employees whose current salaries are well below the market averages for comparable positions will see salary adjustments of more than $1,000. Fairness demands this
approach. In addition, the Provost and I have agreed that we need to address the substandard stipends we have been paying for our part-time faculty, particularly those who teach in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

With leadership from Betty Doster, my Special Assistant for Constituent Relations, we have broadened our base of political support with visits to neighboring communities which both need our assistance and send us students. We have been host to statewide legislative meetings and regional business organizations, such as the Charlotte Chamber and the Charlotte Regional Partnership. We have entertained a constant stream of federal, state, and local elected officials, members of the Board of Governors, local business and community leaders, and alumni with lunches and campus tours. We don’t do that just because we enjoy their company, although in most cases we do. We do that to show what has happened at UNC Charlotte and what still can happen here with their support and engagement. Those visits usually end by the visitor saying to me: “Wow, I had no idea what has happened out here.” For those of you who see me riding around in my golf cart version of the Popemobile, I did about 35 of these lunch and tour meetings last year. My clothes, of course, no longer fit my previously svelte physique.

All of this is not to say that everything at UNC Charlotte is perfect. Like any large and growing institution, we make mistakes. External events over which we have little or no control can have adverse effects on the campus. And, in light of the growth of the Charlotte region and the reputation of this institution, we must plan for increasing demands from prospective and enrolled students, and increasing demands from the regional community for the application of our intellectual capital and other institutional assets to make Charlotte a better place to live, work, and play.

We will start by completing our long range enrollment plan. Last year, we confirmed that the long-range estimate of having 35,000 students enrolled at UNC Charlotte is still feasible. And while we think we have a reasonable understanding of what we can manage with respect to growth in the freshman class, we are still debating the question of how to manage transfer enrollments. And, most importantly, we need to assess our future with respect to enrollment in graduate programs.

To further that assessment, Graduate School Dean Tom Reynolds launched a graduate enrollment planning process last year. The work of an external consultant hired to help with that process is now under review by Tom and the college deans. As soon as things get organized this fall, I’m sure Tom will also be discussing the report with graduate program coordinators and the Graduate Council. What I can say from reading that report and talking both with Tom and Provost Lorden is that we see ample opportunities for expanding the capacity of our existing programs, particularly with investment in enhanced marketing to target audiences, the development of some on-line options, as well as emerging opportunities in interdisciplinary areas. It also appears that, in some instances, additional applications from qualified students may be generated if we think more critically about the role of the standardized graduate entrance exams and whether they constitute unnecessary barriers for some students, particularly working
adults who have already established that they possess the skills and background necessary for graduate work.

As we examine expansion of our graduate programs, of course we need to remind ourselves that the same faculty and staff supporting our graduate programs are also handling our growing number of undergraduates. Candidly, however, what we see from course enrollment data is the need for more attention to be devoted by our graduate programs to ensure that they achieve critical mass in terms of their overall size, to reduce the number of small classes that are not sustainable or justifiable in this era of limited resources, and to address significant issues with respect to student retention and completion. The work necessary to manage graduate programs effectively must be embedded in our strategic planning and annual assessment procedures so that UNC Charlotte can deliver graduate education efficiently and effectively in the future.

We view the discussion of the consultant’s report as just the beginning of a much more complete discussion of the future of graduate education at UNC Charlotte. And, as the Provost’s remarks suggested, we will also use the academic planning process as the opportunity to explore the need for, and potential expansion of, master’s and doctoral offerings.

The plan for graduate enrollment will be just one part of a much larger academic planning effort that the Provost outlined for you in her remarks. While that process is underway this year, we will be preparing for next year’s larger review of our Institutional Plan which currently is scheduled to expire in 2016. I anticipate that the 2015-2016 academic year will be key to completing the Institutional Plan that is necessary to support the initiatives developed in the Academic Plan.

The Provost has already outlined for you the major planned initiatives for the Division of Academic Affairs this year, including the continuing implementation of the Information Technology Master Plan. Our other administrative divisions will be equally busy with important initiatives too numerous to list in detail here. But I can mention some highlights.

Business Affairs will be strengthening our capacity to understand our utilization of our physical space and the examination of options for addressing our most critical space needs. Led by Vice Chancellor Beth Hardin and working with Academic Affairs, we will also attempt to develop a new process to match our most critical needs for renovations and repairs, particularly in our older buildings, with available funding sources.

Student Affairs has assumed responsibility for addressing the needed development of a new office led by Title IX Coordinator Dawn Floyd to investigate and resolve any complaints of sexual assault that may come to our attention, and to implement a training program to make faculty and staff aware of our obligations under Title IX with respect to issues of sexual assault. Vice Chancellor Art Jackson also has new planned initiatives to address the needs of American Indian and Asian American students to complement what we are already doing for African
American students and other student populations. I’m also pleased to announce today that the Chancellor’s Diversity Challenge Grant program is being expanded this year by 50%, bringing the total funding available for enhancing diversity-related programming to $150,000.

In University Advancement, Vice Chancellor Niles Sorensen will be leading the effort to execute the first phase of a comprehensive fundraising campaign over the next five years. Our Executive Director of University Communications, Stephen Ward, will lead the work of the new University Communications Council and its subordinate committees to develop a more unified set of messages to our internal and external audiences. And Betty Doster, Special Assistant for Constituent Relations, will continue a set of activities to strengthen our legislative relations program, including the execution of 3-4 county visitations in the region and an expanded set of presentations I plan to deliver in Mecklenburg County on the importance of the University to the future of this community.

In Athletics, we will certainly use this year to gain additional experience in running a football program and look forward to our transition into Conference USA in that sport in the fall of 2015. The installation of lights in Jerry Richardson Stadium will begin after the conclusion of our last home game in November so we’ll be ready for evening play in 2015. We also need to work this year with faculty and staff on how we will manage any weeknight games we might be required to play after we join Conference USA and their national television package. I would like to say that there will be no disruptions to normal classroom schedules or other planned campus activities if we have a weeknight game, but obviously that would not be accurate. Fortunately, we anticipate only one weeknight game in any single season.

In the Chancellor’s Office, which includes Legal Affairs, we will move forward with the establishment of an institution-wide compliance program in collaboration with our Board of Trustees’ Committee on Audit, Compliance, and Enterprise Risk Management. Legal Affairs will also be broadening its program of education and training for faculty and staff so that we can prevent potential problems. As I mentioned earlier, that work also includes supporting Student Affairs in the implementation of a more robust program relating to Title IX. My Chief of Staff, Krista Newkirk, will lead our effort to implement new software designed to make our institutional planning and assessment process both more complete but also less burdensome on our academic and administrative units. Krista will also work closely with me and the Organizational Science doctoral program to examine and re-engineer 2-3 administrative processes that most of us, including our students, can agree are overly bureaucratic and neither as efficient nor effective as we can possibly make them.

Krista will also oversee the organization of an “all hands on deck” effort in February when we will host a meeting of the Board of Governors on our campus for the first time since 1972. This is a really big deal which was made possible by the new chairman of the Board of Governors, John Fennebresque, who is the first Charlottean to chair the Board of Governors since Cliff Cameron in 1996-1998. We are very excited about this visit because it will provide a
unique opportunity for us to showcase our students, faculty, programs, and beautiful campus to some individuals who are in a great position to support what we’re doing here.

In addition to all of this academic and administrative work, it should not surprise you to learn that this year will also involve additional physical development of the campus. Construction will continue on Phase XIII, a 406-bed suite complex in South Village, with an expected opening of fall, 2015. Planning for Phase XIV (430 beds) has been completed, with an expected ground-breaking in October. This important new project will be the future residential, academic, and administrative home of the Levine Scholars Program and the University Honors Program, and will occupy a prominent location near the traffic circle at the front entrance on University City Blvd. Planning has also been completed for the future home of our marching band. With funding support through a generous gift from former Board of Trustees Chair and alumnus Gene Johnson and his wife, Vickie, the Johnson Band Center will be ready sometime in 2015 prior to the first season of FBS football competition in Conference USA.

We will also use this year to make final assessments on some additional campus construction opportunities, including a potential hotel-conference center near the future light rail stop on North Tryon Street (Highway 29), a health and wellness center for students, faculty, and staff, and a joint public-private venture to create a competitive aquatic center that might serve as a home for a women’s intercollegiate swimming team and a recreational facility for the University community and the public at large. We will also be developing possible options for renovation of the Cone Center and the Residence Dining Hall (RDH) which is being put out of the food service business with the October opening of the South Village Crossing dining facility.

Some of the construction on campus this year will be messy. As you endure the traffic challenges, I hope you'll remember that a new signalized entrance on University City Blvd. at the South Entrance to the campus will be a good thing, as will the new southbound entrance from Harris Blvd. entering the campus at Alumni Way. We will also be re-routing Phillips Road to run above the floodplain between the Hayes Baseball Stadium and the Halton-Wagner Tennis Facility to create a new four-way signal near Woodward Hall. For those of you who may not know the street names around here, Phillips Road is the road from hell that ascends from the athletic fields area up to the main campus. Phillips Road becomes impassable a few times each year due to flooding, many a good clutch has been burned out on the steepest portion of the road, and the intersection with Cameron Blvd. at the top has been one of our worst traffic bottlenecks.

And finally, with respect to major traffic issues this year, if you have traditionally entered the campus from North Tryon Street (Highway 29), you might think about changing your habits as the construction of the light rail entrance into campus will surely tax your patience at least until the expected completion in the summer of 2017. As you sit there in your car, remember this temper-calming chant: “Light rail will be a good thing, light rail will be a good thing....”
I began my remarks this morning with a comment about the beginning of my tenth year as your Chancellor. Looking back, let me quote from my Convocation remarks from August 16, 2005: 

“I should say, I love being here. I’m amazed at the changes we’ve seen not only in the physical landscape of the campus but also in the programmatic landscape. You should be very proud of what has happened here.... I hope also that you’ll be equally excited about what can happen here and, with your continued dedication, will happen here. Lisa and I are thrilled to be back. We love the Charlotte community. We love the 'big house.' That commute to get home at night is a bear, but I’ll make it work.”

Looking forward, in 2015 UNC Charlotte will celebrate our 50th anniversary of entrance into the consolidated UNC system. Charlotte College effectively became the fourth campus of the UNC system on March 2, 1965, by act of the General Assembly, a change in status and a change in title to UNC Charlotte that became effective on July 1, 1965. In that first year, we awarded 85 degrees in a dozen baccalaureate degree programs. Since then, in a short 50 years, we have awarded nearly 123,000 degrees and now do so in 80 bachelor’s, 63 master’s, and 21 doctoral programs. That’s 123,000 lives changed for the better, with the support of dedicated faculty and staff working in an institution that has to be considered one of the great success stories of American higher education. I can still say what I said nearly ten years ago: You should be very proud of what has happened here. And, we still like living in the “big house.”

Thank you very much, and good morning.