

A long journey, and a bright future

By Philip L. Dubois
Special to the Observer



Two important milestones converge at UNC Charlotte during the next week.

Today and Friday, the UNC Board of Governors holds its meetings on our campus. That's an historic event because it's the first time since 1972 that the entire board has visited campus. For the UNC Charlotte community, it presents an opportunity to describe the school's dynamic changes in those 43 years, and to show how our mission is intertwined with the future of the state's largest city.

On Monday, we will experience another momentous occasion for the University community and our supporters – the 50th anniversary of UNC Charlotte becoming the fourth campus of the UNC system, a system today made up of 17 institutions.

It's difficult to comprehend that this beautiful campus with more than 27,200 students started as a night school called Charlotte Center in 1946, and then became Charlotte College in 1949, only after tremendous efforts by founder Bonnie Cone and local leaders. They struggled mightily to get Charlotte Center reborn as Charlotte College and then launched as UNC Charlotte in 1965. Now UNC Charlotte is the state's only urban research university.

Why are these two milestones important? Hosting the meetings provides UNC Charlotte with the opportunity to showcase its students and academic programs to the board, which disburses funding from the state legislature. Of the total enrollment growth in the UNC system over the past six years, UNC Charlotte alone is responsible for 46 percent of it! We need the board's support to secure the funding necessary to hire the faculty and to build the facilities that will be needed as we grow to our long-range enrollment projection of 35,000 students.

This visit provides an avenue for the board to see why a stronger UNC Charlotte – for our next 50 years – means a stronger Charlotte region, which in turn means a stronger North Carolina.

Here are some examples:

- A Milken Institute study of 2013 concluded that each year of additional higher education for a city's workers who already have high school degrees increases GDP per capita by 17.4 percent.

- UNC Charlotte is a great partner with the region's major economic drivers to prepare the workforce of the future. In addition to the very successful Energy Production & Infrastructure Center, our Data Science & Business Analytics initiative is addressing rapidly emerging workforce needs for data-savvy managers in financial services, healthcare, retail and energy. Private sector investments in these projects are complementing the state's appropriations.
- A recent study completed by the UNC system showed that the accumulated annual contribution of UNC Charlotte to the Charlotte region through payroll, operations, construction, and start-up companies is about \$2.1 billion.

To be sure, the future is big for UNC Charlotte's impact on the Charlotte region and beyond – as long as North Carolinians continue to support the growth and success of our public universities.

Philip L. Dubois is chancellor of UNC Charlotte.