

“A Perspective on Administrative Growth in UNC”

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In lean budgetary times, growth in the administration of UNC system institutions is certainly something to be concerned about. Thus, for at least the past three years, President Bowles has provided strong leadership for campuses to monitor administrative costs, reduce those costs where possible, and to be administratively efficient. While recent increases in the number of administrators on some campuses may deserve a more complete explanation, what is lacking in The Observer's recent commentary on this subject is context.

Anyone who has worked in higher education understands the reasons for the relative growth of administration. The days when the University could simply teach its students and conduct research have long since passed. Public and governmental expectations with respect to the “deliverables” of higher education continue to expand. Supporting faculty in their teaching and research requires the acquisition and maintenance of increasingly expensive and complicated technologies. We are expected to transfer the products of our research into the private marketplace. We are expected to guide students through the advising process and then find them a job. We provide counseling to those with psychological or emotional problems. We must raise private funds to supplement our state appropriations. We are asked to extend University services to the public and contribute to regional economic development. We face increasing regulatory requirements relating to the conduct of research, animal care, environmental compliance, privacy and security of records, taxation, and auditing. State legislators have increased the number and complexity of annual reports on the use of state funds. Finally, universities today operate in more challenging environments to ensure campus safety and security, with the need to plan for everything from a flu pandemic to the presence of an active shooter. All of these important and now essential tasks in a modern university require administrative staff.

So, just how significantly have these new demands affected the growth in administration? Recently, the Chronicle of Higher Education examined growth in management personnel at American universities from 1997 to 2007 using federally-reported data. That study confirmed increases in the number of executive administrators and professional staff per 100 full time equivalent (FTE) students, averaging 30% in private colleges and 38% in public institutions.

Among UNC campuses, the growth in administration has varied significantly, largely reflecting the adequacy or inadequacy of their administrative support a decade ago. Even with growth, however, the vast majority of our campuses employ between 3 and 5 executive administrators and professional staff per 100 FTE students. That compares quite favorably to the national average of 8 reported for all public institutions in The Chronicle study, rising as high as 25 in some schools with large medical centers. Moreover, 13 of the 16 UNC constituent institutions reporting in 2007 employed fewer administrators per 100 FTE students than the national average. By this measure, the vast majority of UNC campuses are less administratively-intensive than most public institutions in the country. At UNC Charlotte, our administrative and professional staff grew by 19% over the decade (compared to the national average of 38%), and numbers less than half the national average with 3.64 administrators per 100 FTE students enrolled.

UNC is a complex institution with a broad and demanding mission. Delivering on that mission requires leadership and management as well as dedicated faculty.

