

Op/ed by Philip L. Dubois to Charlotte Observer

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CALL TO OWNERSHIP

UNC system President Erskine Bowles recently urged Charlotte's public officials, business executives, and civic leaders to stake a larger claim in their local public university. As President Bowles so accurately observed: No city can become "world class" without having a world-class public research university. For that to happen, he said, Charlotte must "own" UNC Charlotte.

But what does it mean for Charlotte to "own" its university?

For one, it means continuing to support UNC Charlotte's lofty aspirations to develop as a major research institution. We would not today be home to 18 doctoral programs without the support of business and community leaders who recognized the importance of a research university to regional economic development. Legislative leaders have pushed hard for the development of research-related facilities, including the Bioinformatics Research Center which, once completed in 2009, will anchor the bioinformatics research efforts for the North Carolina Research Campus in nearby Kannapolis

Corporate support was vital for the development of the Charlotte Research Institute (CRI), our portal for business-university technology partnerships. Ten million dollars in support for CRI from the Duke Energy Foundation was the largest single gift ever made to UNC Charlotte. Endowed professorships have been sponsored by individual, family, and corporate names that have long been the core of the Charlotte business community--Bank of America, Belk, Blumenthal, Duke Power, Hemby, Harris, Spangler, and TIAA-CREF. For the past 25 years, First Citizens Bank has sponsored our most prestigious recognition for faculty research.

Notwithstanding all of this support, the job is far from done if we are to realize our full potential as Charlotte's research university. We must continue to strengthen our doctoral and professional programs. We must add endowed faculty positions to enable the recruitment and retention of outstanding researchers. Scholarships and financial support for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows continue to be high priorities. We seek new research partnerships and opportunities for taking advances from the lab bench into products that have valuable contemporary applications, in fields from engineering to translational medicine. We seek a more significant presence in the Charlotte arts community.

"Owning" UNC Charlotte also means learning more about the quality of your home town university and the outstanding educational choice that it represents. Our entering freshman class has an average grade point average of 3.6. We serve students from 97 of North Carolina's 100 counties, 45 other states, and 89 foreign countries. Undergraduate

degrees are offered in 89 fields, with the master's degree available in 61.

If you are an employer, “owning” UNC Charlotte means our giving students a fair chance to compete for internships and jobs alongside talented students from your alma mater.

Graduates of UNC Charlotte's leading program in motorsports engineering in the William States Lee College of Engineering are prominent members of leading NASCAR race teams. Our alumni in accounting from the Belk College of Business include the current chief financial officers of Bank of America (Joe Price), Duke Energy (David Hauser), Nucor (Terry Lisenby), and both the CEO (Robert Niblock) and CFO (Bob Hull) of Lowe's. Charlotte's College of Computing and Informatics is home to the 2006 Cybersecurity National Champions.

“Owning” UNC Charlotte means appreciating the important role that it plays in helping the region to address the various challenges that accompany growth and urbanization.

UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute has recently announced a significant initiative to benchmark the region's economic, social, and environmental progress. The Charlotte Center for Community Design in the College of Architecture has recently completed the Optimist Park Urban Study and master plans for Stewart Village and Camden Square.

The new Institute for Social Capital has developed an innovative database to promote data sharing among schools and social service agencies to better serve Charlotte's children.

“Owning” UNC Charlotte means taking up our funding challenges as yours. Our recent long-range enrollment plan indicates that UNC Charlotte will need to reach 35,000 by the year 2020 to properly serve this growing region. We will not be able to meet that demand if the funding formulas of the UNC system are not adjusted to remedy historic deficiencies. The campus expected to be one of the fastest-growing UNC campuses in the next decade cannot continue to be ranked 13th in per-student funding among the 16 four-year schools in the system.

“Owning UNC Charlotte means being concerned about expanding our physical capacity to serve the region. Although the campus has been transformed by seven new academic buildings made possible by the 2000 Higher Education Bond measure adopted by voters, all of the bond-funded buildings are complete. And while we look forward to new buildings such as the Bioinformatics Research Center and the new Center City facility and Ninth and Brevard, those new structures will not be sufficient to manage our expected growth. If state policymakers and the Board of Governors expect UNC Charlotte to help accommodate a significant portion of the 80,000 new students expected at the University by the end of the next decade, we cannot afford the traditional UNC approach of establishing capital construction priorities by rotation among the campuses.

The campus expected to add the largest number of new students in the UNC system in the next decade cannot remain 15th in academic space per student among the 16 four-year UNC schools.

And finally, “owning” UNC Charlotte means buying season tickets and turning out to support the Charlotte 49ers once in awhile. We certainly understand the local loyalty to

other teams and the Atlantic Coast Conference, and disappointment expressed this year about our not advancing to post-season play. But any team with 7 NCAA and 2 NIT appearances since 1997 should be a point of pride for all Charlotteans. The Niner Nation will gladly welcome new members!

So, Charlotte, we hope you'll take up Erskine Bowles' challenge: it's time to "own" your public research university.