

Viewpoint

UNC Charlotte funding will boost local economy

Philip Dubois

This week, the North Carolina General Assembly convened for the short legislative session. Our elected officials are tasked with making decisions that will influence UNC Charlotte's success in both the near and long term. We are hard at work making our priorities known.

Our most important legislative priority for this session is a salary increase for staff and faculty. We are very supportive of plans to increase K-12 teacher pay, but salary increases for all state employees must be addressed as well. UNC Charlotte faculty and staff have received only one raise of 1.2% in the last five years. This cripples our ability to attract and retain top talent.

It is also essential for UNC Charlotte to obtain support for our growing number of students. While some schools are seeing their numbers decline, demand for UNC Charlotte is growing dramatically in parallel to the Charlotte region's rapid population increase. Over the past five years, growth in the UNC system has totaled about 6,800 students, and one campus – UNC Charlotte – is responsible for 48% of that increase. For the current school year, we received 17,000 freshman applications, up from 14,400 for 2013. Additional support is crucial if we are to continue to provide access to higher education for well-qualified students.

As students are increasingly drawn to UNC Charlotte, the demand for instruction in the sciences is also outpacing the capacity of our aging science facility. Constructed in 1986, that facility can no longer be upgraded in a cost-effective way to serve as a modern center for science education and research. Accordingly, our top capital priority for more than five years has been \$12.6 million in planning funds to replace it. We will soon reach the point where it is no longer possible for us to accept additional outstanding students who seek degrees in the sciences and engineering.

As part of the UNC Board of Governors budget request for the state to invest in new “game-changing” areas of research and education, we seek support for our industry-led Data Science and Business Analytics initiative. Big Data has transformed commerce worldwide, and we are on the frontier of its applications in the diverse economic sectors that comprise the fundamental building blocks of the Charlotte economy — financial services, retail, health care and energy. As we saw in building our initiative to strengthen the energy cluster in Charlotte — the Energy Production and Infrastructure Center — a dynamic public-private partnership is essential. We

seek state funding to hire the faculty and technical staff necessary to work with our industry partners, including the likes of [Belk Inc.](#), [Bank of America Corp.](#), [Carolinas HealthCare System](#), Deloitte, Lowe's Cos. Inc., [SAS Institute Inc.](#) and others, to exploit the full potential of data analytics to strengthen business decision-making and customer relationships.

As North Carolina's urban research university, we have the distinct ability to shape a thriving and diverse economy and meet the ever-changing needs around us. Our efforts are fortified by the many businesses and industry leaders that partner with us. We rely on this support, along with that of our alumni and the greater Charlotte community, to remind legislators of our critical role in ensuring the prosperity of the region.

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