



Office of the Chancellor

9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, NC 28223
t/ 704-687-2201 www.uncc.edu

Philip L. Dubois
Chancellor

Higher education and tech talent will shape Charlotte's future

Op-Ed for The Charlotte Observer

Philip L. Dubois, Chancellor

Feb 02, 2018

We've learned through the Amazon HQ2 experience that Charlotte's strengths might not be compelling to everyone. But we also have learned that even more substantial investment is necessary to help strengthen UNC Charlotte's higher education leadership position within our region's economy.

Our region's relative lack of higher education horsepower, as indicated by enrollment, is significant when compared to the "Amazon top 20." Public and private research universities serving the Amazon finalist cities have combined enrollments ranging from about 51,000 students in Nashville to New York's nearly 350,000. As the only research institution in our region, UNC Charlotte's enrollment of 29,317 trails far behind. Adding in the excellent but much smaller higher education institutions in our region closes, but does not eliminate, that gap. Thus, our ability to deliver prepared graduates is not much of an issue when recruiting major companies like Met Life, Sealed Air, and Allstate with much smaller local employment bases. But the gap *is* significant when attempting to feed the talent needs of the behemoth that is Amazon.

The relationship between higher education capacity and economic development has been an important part of regional history. Former Chancellor Jim Woodward observed in 1989 that Charlotte was the largest U.S. city without a major public research University. Jim and critical local partners, including leaders in the North Carolina General Assembly and the Charlotte Chamber, secured authority and funding for UNC Charlotte to grant doctoral degrees and to modify our mission to build research capacity. Today our 23 doctoral programs are in full flower and our externally funded research has topped \$50 million, more than a 110% increase from 2004.

But these efforts were certainly not going to be the end of the story. As I became UNC Charlotte's chancellor in 2005, the country had 23 cities with populations close to the then- projected growth of Charlotte by the year 2020; enrollment at public universities in these regions averaged around 40,000. Our Board of Governors' projected 2020 enrollment at the time for UNC Charlotte was 28,000.

That is one of the reasons we set a long-term enrollment goal of 35,000 and perhaps more. Our enrollment growth represents 38 percent of the increase in the entire 16-campus UNC system since 2010. And, assuming an appropriate level of investment, we could do more, with our main campus able to support up to 40,000 students. Indeed, with additional off- campus academic facilities that can take advantage of light rail, such as UNC Charlotte Center City, it is not fanciful to imagine an institution of 60,000 students. The University of Central Florida is a prime example.

Every year, UNC Charlotte awards more than 7,200 degrees. Our graduates are ready to work in high-demand STEM fields and the vast majority choose to live and work in Charlotte. The College of Computing and Informatics, the largest program of its kind in the state and among the largest in the nation, will graduate an estimated 3,500 students by 2023 from its undergraduate and graduate programs in computer science, software and information systems, data science, and bioinformatics. They will join the already soaring growth of tech talent in our region. According to CBRE's 2017 *Scoring Tech Talent* report, tech occupations in Charlotte grew 77 percent from 2011 to 2016, outpacing by wide margins all the cities that are finalists for Amazon's expansion. Over the same period, Charlotte also led growth in total tech degrees, suggesting a strengthening level of competitiveness that will redefine what it means to do business in Charlotte.

The long-term workforce needs in our growing region require robust continuing investment in UNC Charlotte from the General Assembly and the philanthropic community. When combined with the compelling story we can already tell about Charlotte's dynamic and interdependent business, cultural, educational, governmental, and charitable communities, Charlotte will be ready to head the list of preferred home and regional office locations.

The UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at CHARLOTTE

An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

