

Access and Opportunity for Every Deserving Student  
Op-Ed for Higher Education Works Foundation  
Philip L. Dubois, Chancellor  
March 30, 2017

## UNC Charlotte

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Founded just 70 years ago to educate veterans returning from World War II, what is today known as UNC Charlotte remains committed to its original mission to provide access to the benefits of higher education for every deserving student. The 278 veterans who enrolled in the Charlotte Center of the University of North Carolina in the fall of 1946 could not have imagined that their thirst for opportunity under the GI Bill would lead to the creation of the two-year Charlotte College in 1949, to the offering of four-year degrees in 1960, and to the General Assembly's 1965 approval for UNC Charlotte to become the UNC system's fourth campus (joining sister institutions at Chapel Hill, NC State, and Greensboro).

Today, UNC Charlotte stands strong with nearly 29,000 students enrolled at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels. And our phenomenal growth over the past five years appears to be accelerating, accounting since 2010 for more than half of the enrollment growth in all sixteen four-year institutions comprising the UNC system. At the same time, our students' academic qualifications have never been stronger and our diversity continues to expand.

What makes the University so attractive? We believe it comes down to opportunity, and to the distinctive ways in which UNC Charlotte defines opportunity. We welcome traditional freshmen, first-generation college students, community college transfers, returning adults, veterans, and persons with disabilities. And these students come from a wide variety of economic, religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds, from throughout the country and from across the globe.

Our students are attracted to the opportunity to earn degrees that will help them thrive personally and in the workplace. We target our academic programs and research emphases to effectively deliver on the promise of our mission statement: to address "the cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health, and social needs of the greater Charlotte region." Recently approved new programs in Cyber Security (M.S.), Health Systems Management (B.S.), Respiratory Care (M.S.), and Business Management (M.S.) are consistent with that promise.

So, too, are initiatives we have launched in partnership with employers to address major workforce needs in the greater Charlotte region. UNC Charlotte's Energy Production and Infrastructure Center (EPIC) supports the development of employees prepared to construct, maintain, and operate conventional and alternative sources of electrical power. Similarly, our Data Science Initiative (DSI) brings together business and University

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leaders to create education, research, and professional development programs that help the area's financial services, healthcare, retail, and energy businesses convert vast amounts of digital data into insights that will help them work more efficiently and effectively.

And our connections to the city and region we serve are about to become decidedly physical as well. This August, our campus of nearly 1,000 wooded acres in the thriving University City district will become the terminus of the Charlotte Area Transit System's newly extended light rail line. An amazing 107 Blue Line trains will arrive on campus every day, connecting our University City and Center City campuses and improving our community's access to the southernmost reaches of the City.

Light rail will expand our students' internship, job, cultural, and entertainment opportunities, and we hope it will bring even more of the regional community to our campus. A campus visit is usually a jaw-dropping experience for visitors who haven't been to UNC Charlotte in a few years. They are struck by our physical growth, the beauty of our buildings and grounds, and the many opportunities that come with a complete campus experience—a full line-up of Division I athletics, excellent performing arts, a gorgeous botanical garden, and one of the nation's finest student unions, to name a few.

We know that the demand for admission to UNC Charlotte will continue to rise. We know that, as more major businesses look to locate in Charlotte, a hometown university ranked high on national and global scales is crucial. And we know that, even though most of our work is supported by state investment through appropriations and tuition, we do need to help ourselves.

In conjunction with our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary last fall, we kicked off the EXPONENTIAL Campaign, the largest fundraising effort in the University's history, with a goal of \$200 million to be raised by the end of 2020. The campaign speaks to our unusual growth, expansion, and scope, focusing on four goals: providing more financial aid, enriching the student experience, supporting the best faculty, and building programs with regional impact, such as EPIC and DSI. To date, we have already raised more than \$120 million.

UNC Charlotte has come of age over the past 70 years. And while a lot has changed, we have remained true to the timeless vision of our founder, Ms. Bonnie Cone: UNC Charlotte is a place of access and opportunity for every deserving student.