

May 2018 President's Report to the UNC Board of Governors

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Bissette

Today is a milestone for this Board – new Board elections and the last full meeting under Lou Bissette's chairmanship. Lou, what a pleasure it has been to work with you.

As we've worked together to build the talent and leadership we need at each of our institutions, this System has benefited immensely from your professionalism, integrity, and dedication.

Your leadership on behalf of this University, this state, and most importantly, its people is a formidable legacy. Your friendship, support, and guidance since I arrived here two years ago has been invaluable. And we all know your work and your impact won't end with your term as Chairman.

On behalf of the UNC System, thank you for your service.

Commencements

This is also the end of commencement season. More than 35,000 students earned degrees this spring, bringing the grand total up to more than 54,000 in the 2017-2018 academic year.

At our institutions, dozens of commencement speakers have spoken to our graduates about the future ahead of them, including state senators and representatives, congressmen, and US Senators. I want to thank Senator Richard Burr in particular, for speaking at UNC Pembroke.

I too had the chance to speak to our graduates at ECSU's commencement. Governor Ramsey joined me there, and I think he'd agree that energy on campus is higher than ever. I want to thank this Board for their steadfast commitment to supporting that institution and to Chancellor Conway for his leadership in setting ECSU on a sound path.

Chancellor Conway has given more than four decades of service to this System and our state, and we're better because of it.

While Chancellor Conway isn't here today, please join me in thanking him for his service.

He leaves ECSU in good hands as interim-chancellor Karrie Dixon steps into the role. Karrie is a dynamo, whose energy, commitment, and intelligence will serve her well as she steps up to serve ECSU and Northeast North Carolina.

Karrie, thank you for your leadership at this pivotal time as we implement the NC Promise program and confront the future. Will you please stand?

Community Colleges

This month, I also had the chance to speak at one of our state's leading community colleges, Forsyth Tech, for their graduation. I first visited there over a decade ago, as I joined President Bush on a trip to recognize the biotechnology work happening there – work that's still attracting attention today.

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Community colleges are a critical partner for us as we build a college going culture and meet the statewide attainment goal that will emerge from the myFutureNC Commission later this year.

I'm thrilled to have Peter Hans, a leader we all know well, step into his new role as President of the Community College System. He'll be a terrific partner, and our work together has already begun.

Accountability, Data Dashboards

Yesterday, new data dashboards for each institution went live on our site. This is yet another step forward for transparency, accountability, and a new model for how higher education can serve its state.

I'm grateful for the work that each institution put into customizing their dashboard to capture each of their distinct strengths.

Higher education isn't known for excelling at transparency and accountability, but as a System, we are doing just that. With this Board's strategic plan, our 17 institution-specific performance agreements, and now these dashboards, we've made our plan more than just words on paper. We are using it to achieve big results on our campuses.

I want to make this clear – the UNC System is a national leader on how to build a strong accountability system that raises expectations, produces results, and still leaves flexibility for innovation and vision from our institutions. We are doing it right, enabling leaders to show their successes, allowing data and measurable goals to empower their efforts, not constrain them.

Data Modernization and Short Session

It is remarkable, however, how much we are doing with the anemic data systems we currently have. Because make no mistake, we are limited by our outdated information systems, and as Governor Smith and I wrote last week in the News and Observer, we must modernize our infrastructure.

We are grateful to the legislature for their help on this effort and are hopeful for that support to continue so we can create a sustainable system that gives policymakers at every level the information they need, when they need it.

While modernizing our data systems is a top priority for the short session, we are grateful for the Legislature's consideration of several additional priorities that this Board approved at last month's meeting. They include efforts around student success, talent retention, applied research, and capital projects.

Action is happening quickly in Raleigh, I'm grateful for all those on this Board who have spent their time and energy advancing our System priorities at the General Assembly, and I'm thankful to our Chancellors for helping advance those core issues as well.

We must speak with one voice in Raleigh because the System priorities this Board approved are the most pressing items we have in order to best serve the people of this state.

Belk Endowment Gift

I also want to touch on a few happenings here at the Board and System.

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Today, we are announcing a generous \$3 million gift from the John M. Belk Endowment to fund work on two important fronts.

Over \$2 million will go to financial aid efforts, including support for a joint study group in partnership with the Community College System to look at how we can simplify and improve the state grant programs that serve our students, and funding to test promising approaches to financial aid and rigorously evaluate those projects.

Innovative financial supports like summer grants, micro-grants, and incentive-based grants have the potential to be game-changers for our students, but we need hard data on their effectiveness before we invest significant additional taxpayer dollars.

Additionally, the Belk Endowment's gift will also fund the implementation of the recommendations from our math pathways initiative.

Gateway math courses are a fundamental part of higher ed. It affects every student, it is a driving source of disparities and achievement gaps, and they are pivotal in determining whether we graduate students with the skills they need to compete in the modern labor market.

This is the hard work behind the progress we often cite, like the rising graduation rates throughout the System. That work doesn't always make the headlines, but when respected statewide players like the Belk Endowment step up and say loudly and clearly that they believe in the importance of this work and want to help further it – that's a moment to appreciate.

I am profoundly grateful for their support especially the leadership of MC Belk Pilon. They are a trusted partner of the UNC System and we are better because of their support.

Digital Learning, Online Learning

Yesterday, we made progress on another key front, through a great policy discussion of online and digital learning.

What's clear to me is that we need a strategy that meets our state's needs and addresses issues of affordability and access, and advances not just incremental progress, but transformational progress.

And what has become clear through the myFutureNC Commission is that we need a seismic increase in educational attainment in our state, especially for adults who currently have some college but no degree.

I believe I speak for all of us here when I say that I'm glad to have Jim Ptaszynski leading this effort and bringing his national expertise to bear.

Jim knows the market, he knows the challenges, and most importantly, he's thinking big. Our next move cannot be preparing for the marketplace as it exists now, we must set ourselves up to be competitive with what the demands will be a decade from now.

Personnel Changes

Finally, a few staff updates. First, I want to join the Board in welcoming our new ASG President and student board member Bettylenah Njaramba from North Carolina Central University who you've met today. I think her enthusiasm is infectious, and I look forward to working with her over the coming year.

And while this is her first Board meeting, it is the last Board meeting for our four Presidential Scholars. Farris Smith, Elizabeth Boney, Katie Stanley, and Carson Rich who have been outstanding members of the UNC System team over the past year including valuable service at these Board meetings to keep the gears turning. Three of them, Farris, Carson, and Katie are planning to remain in state, and Elizabeth is headed to DC.

Please join me in thanking and commending them for their great work.

I also want to thank and congratulate Gabriel Lugo as he completes a successful term as Chair of the Faculty Assembly. Gabriel has been a trusted and persistent voice for faculty across the System.

Shared governance is a hallmark of higher education that makes us stronger, and I appreciate Gabriel's support and advocacy on behalf of those working on the front lines of our world-class teaching and research enterprise. Gabriel, please stand.

We're also saying farewell to two members of my senior team. Junius Gonzales had his last day this week and is off to serve as provost at New York Institute of Technology.

For the last three years, Junius has led Academic Affairs with dedication and intellect. In the months before I arrived, Junius stepped up to serve as interim President.

His work here has expanded online course offerings and standardized community college transfer credits. He's launched a highly successful faculty fellowship program and grown our research enterprise across the System. On key issues of assessment and analytics, we are stronger because of his efforts.

We will miss Junius, but I am excited to see what he does in the next chapter of his journey at New York Institute of Technology. Junius is in New York today, preparing for that next step, but please join me in thanking him *in absentia* for his terrific work – I'm sure he's watching on the livestream.

And at the end of June, we are saying goodbye to Kevin Howell as he leaves his position as Senior Vice President for External Affairs to serve as Vice Chancellor for External Affairs, Partnerships, and Economic Development at NC State.

Kevin and Drew Moretz are hard at work in Raleigh and Kevin will stay fully engaged here at the System through the end of Short Session. His return to his alma mater is bittersweet for us here at the System, but we're glad the state will continue to benefit from his infectious optimism, passion, and kindness – not to mention his wealth of knowledge and ability to get the job done.

I don't know if Kevin sketched out this career path when he was Student Body President at NC State a few years ago, but I'm glad he has chosen to give so much back to the public institutions that he once attended. Please join me in thanking Kevin for his service to this System and for all he will continue to do.

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And finally, I want to welcome a new member to our team. Elizabeth Morra, is our new Vice President of Federal Affairs. Elizabeth brings over 25 years of DC experience, including six years serving on Appropriations Committee Staff and nearly 16 years working on behalf of a range of organizations.

She also boasts some NC connections, including two years working as a reporter in Greensboro and a daughter enrolling at Carolina this fall. Elizabeth knows DC and has long excelled at getting results. Her impact is already making a difference for this System, especially as work continues on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Her role in DC is on behalf of all our institutions. Each of them have concerns before Congress and the Administration.

For instance, right now we're tracking issues in the Farm Bill, the National Defense Authorization Act, multiple research funding bills, including money specifically geared towards HBCU'S, HEA reauthorization, and mark-ups for a range of appropriation bills on everything from Energy and Agriculture to Transportation and Health Care.

It's a mouthful to say, and even more to stay on top of.

I'm pleased to have someone of Elizabeth's caliber in DC to ensure the UNC System is punching at its weight and protecting the interests of each of our institutions. Please join me in welcoming Elizabeth Morra.

And, as I mentioned at the top of my remarks, today are new officer elections, and I look forward to working with our new slate of leaders, Governors Smith, Ramsey, and Burris-Floyd. I'm confident we're going to continue to have success – and fun – under your leadership.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my report.