



**UNC Tomorrow Listening Forum
Summary of Public Input
Hickory (Metro Convention Center)
October 3, 2007, 4:00 pm**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Main themes expressed by the public:

- ◆ Higher education in the region – Provide direct access to higher education by establishing a physical presence in Hickory (campus, satellite campus, or higher education center) so that higher education is accessible, affordable, and flexible for the needs of the region; increase resources to all campuses in the western part of the state
- ◆ K-12 – More and better teachers, more math and science teachers, recruit more students into the teaching profession, expand the Teaching Fellows program, establish special scholarships for math and science teachers, create “Teach for North Carolina” program (modeled after “Teach for America”), prepare teachers for current teaching environment
- ◆ Health care – More nurses and nursing faculty; more pharmacists, physical therapists and occupational therapists
- ◆ Develop “seamless” relationship with Community Colleges and Private Colleges (Lenoir-Rhyne College); expand 2+2 programs and strengthen Community College articulation agreements
- ◆ Establish a School of Science and Math in the western part of the state
- ◆ Growing Hispanic population – Provide educational opportunities for Hispanic students
- ◆ Increase the educational attainment of males in general and African American males in particular
- ◆ Student skills – Students need stronger math and science skills and “soft” skills (creative thinking, problem solving, team building, written and oral communication)
- ◆ Increase programs in entrepreneurship and global awareness reflecting 21st century economy
- ◆ Become more involved in the community – Make resources of faculty and campuses available to help with economic development and regional planning



- ◆ Strengthen public service part of mission by addressing issues such as high school drop-out rate
- ◆ Keep higher education affordable and accessible; explore programs that provide flexible and portable financial aid (such as life-long learning accounts)



DETAILED SUMMARY

Over 400 persons attended the UNC Tomorrow Listening Session in Hickory. The attendees were a diverse group representing many northwestern NC counties, most racial and ethnic minorities, most economic categories, and many of the key regional institutions. The theme of the session was clear – the Hickory region wants a greater presence from the UNC system than currently exists. Whether that is a unique university or a satellite campus from an existing institution was not clear.

Economic Transformation and Workforce Development

- Region needs to embrace higher education and work with UNC system to develop a strategic plan for the region.
- More access to higher education degree programs – build a UNC campus in Hickory
- Must figure out ways to expose young people early on to career options.
- Need workers with skills across a broad spectrum.
- Local residents must overcome the mindset that “you can drop out of school and go get a good job [in textiles or the furniture industry].” This is no longer possible.
- NCDOT has difficulty finding engineering graduate who can fill jobs in the region.
- Video indicated that 40% of future jobs will require post-secondary education – we don’t have the resources, particularly in engineering and technology
- Tough to get engineers to move here – need to train our own (born here, stay here); need funding to attract people like engineers, eventually would like an engineering program - North Carolina Center for Engineering Technologies needed
- Make university faculty more accessible to small business owners
- Need to be able to pursue PhD’s while working
- Support economic development—quality training and support needed, for example in the wine industry.
- Manufacturing job losses is legendary. Hickory lost more than any other city. There is dire need for the right retraining. The area will benefit from a UNC presence in this area—only metropolitan area in the state without a branch of the UNC system.
- Most businesses look to communities that have higher education institutions; just having a UNC presence in this area will help more business to relocate there. R&D industries cluster around universities - UNC presence would help “economic ground zero” and UNC by its presence is a catalyst for economic transition
- Industrial extension service is not well known. There is need to do a better job of publicizing the programs that are available through the system. Many programs are free, but folks don’t know what is available, so they are underutilized while folks continue to have needs. Industrial extension is fee-based; cooperative extension is not.
- Support the work of the SBTDCs.
- Need to continue to support entrepreneurship in the high country (mentioned several times), especially in response to heavy job losses – the region is trying to create a certified entrepreneurial community in the high country and need the help of UNC to



do this; need to collaborate with local ventures to help build budding entrepreneurs and to build certified entrepreneurship communities; fully fund Centers for Entrepreneurship on each campus, including summer programs.

- Create economic databases and indexes that community and businesses can use

K – 12 Issues

- UNC system leadership and assistance needed to increase community involvement in lives of k-12 youth.
- UNC system assistance needed to attract young people to fields of math and science education.
- UNC System needs to establish a School of Science and Math in the western part of the state.
- Create a scholarship program for science and math teachers similar to the Teaching Fellows Program.
- Target single parents for teacher training programs—more likely to stay in the area once they graduate.
- Provide ASU, which currently graduates more teachers than any other UNC system school, with additional resources and funding to train teachers.
- Encourage high schools to focus on youth entrepreneurship.
- UNC system should help K-12 system to educate young people to think more globally.
- Address the drop out rate - should change attendance age to 17 or 18 – now it's too easy to drop out, especially for Hispanics (currently half of Hispanic students in Hickory drop out)
- Graduate more qualified teachers through the UNC system; public school system has to go out of state to recruit teachers.
- High school students need to believe college is a realistic option - key role of mentoring programs, internships and service learning
- Technology needs to be used in the first grade to excite children about learning
- Reestablish the vocational aspect of high schools and down
- Need to have educational diagnostic testing
- Appreciation and respect for vocational careers
- Champions of Education - area businesses funded support of new classrooms in kindergarten – this assists as alternative to day care
- More ESL resources needed
- Educate teachers on diversity
- Build UNC campus in Hickory so it has “spill-over” effects on K-12
- Inspire the brightest and the best to enter teaching
- Create “Teach for NC program” modeled after the “Teach for America” program
- Improve teaching curriculum – make it more “hands-on,” use more technology, teach students leadership and management skills, make the classroom reflect today's environment (college classroom is not the same as K-12 classroom)



- Motivate K-12 students to educational attainment - early exposure to college and career options, one-on-one with professors, mentoring, help change culture that does not value higher education or see its need (years of dependence upon high-paid manufacturing jobs)
- Use university students, athletes, retired faculty, alumni, and faculty for student mentoring and recruiting
- Have competition among campuses and “report cards” for accountability back to communities
- Offer Internet-based professional development for teachers and administrators (no specific discipline mentioned)
- Work together to address the public school teacher shortage—ASU graduates more teachers than any of the other UNC schools. Continue to support ASU’s efforts to address this shortage—need more resources and funding.
- Include ESL training in teacher education programs—teachers are often unaware of issues, so it needs to be addressed in teacher education.
- More robust education programs to train more teachers—often it is difficult to keep the teachers in the area.
- Diversity understanding—teachers should be required to have it and UNC should lead the effort.
- Help close the gap between what is taught in the teacher education programs and the realities they face in the classroom.
- Just churning out more teachers will not solve the problems; help public education by setting up systems for accountability so the resources go to those who are producing teachers who are being effective and are staying in the system – “Business as usual is not good for business.”
- Do more to prepare K-12 students for higher education course work; huge expense to retain or do remediation; collaborate with programs such as Champions of Education.
- Most parents have never used a computer and don’t understand why students need to go to the library to use the computer. Program needed to build awareness—children and parents together learning writing and computer skills, for example—especially among the Hispanic population.
- Provide students with many more basic programs to prepare for higher education, such as summer institutes and summer camps.
- Help to increase community involvement and parental involvement in our school so students will be better prepared for college-level coursework.
- Salute teachers as true treasures; they light a fire under the workers of tomorrow.
- High quality teachers are needed, especially in math and science; UNC need to say what is being done to recruit more into these areas and how the community can help to keep them.
- Families often don’t understanding with their children are learning, so parents and other family members need to be better supported so they can be better prepared to help their children.
- UNC needs to think of an effective way to get some of the brightest and best children to go into education—to become educators.



- UNC must find ways to impact the starting salaries of educators. There are big disparities between starting salaries in business and in education.
- Students are bored with public education. Many know more about computers than their teachers do, even recently graduated teachers. Teachers need to be prepared to challenge their students.

Graduate Persons with Knowledge and Skills for Global Competitiveness

- Workers and students need more “soft skills” training.
- Build moral foundation in university graduate – workers need to have strong work ethic, sense of citizenship, and altruism
- Need to think more globally and to train students to work in the global economy.
- Expand internships and have students complete meaningful projects in businesses large and small-make linkage to didactic explicit
- Train workforce for future jobs – technical, R&D, development, engineering
- UNC system needs to help English speaking or native-born population to become culturally competent and diversity sensitive.

Increase Access to Higher Education for At-Risk Students

- If not born here (or not a legal immigrant), no opportunity for college scholarships (Federal dollars). UNC system needs to take a stand on the tuition issue for undocumented immigrant students.
- University needs to do a better job of making programs and opportunities known to students who could benefit – need to reach out to Latina community (Latina high school student)
- Develop programmatic initiatives to provide access to UNC system for minorities who face affordability issues
- Hmong (Asian ethnic group) came from Laos following Viet Nam War – many are low-income and college is unaffordable; need a 4 year college here in Hickory because families are close and members stay together
- Increase educational attainment of African Americans - work with at risk youth; disadvantaged and low income homes-current perception is that the only way to go to college is through athletics; there are too many African American males in the criminal justice system – they need to be in the educational system
- Keep higher education affordable - parents work inordinate hours just to make ends meet and spend life times repaying loans
- Hispanic students - need more financial aid(Universities need to provide scholarships, not out of state tuition); Central Latino link to school system to provide interpreters



Health Care

- Critical shortage of nurses in the region
- Health care workers in short supply - average time to fill vacancies is well over a year
- Encourage education system schools to address the education and training needs of health care industry.
- Lenoir-Rhyne has a successful nursing program, but it is small; UNC system should collaborate with Lenoir Rhyne to expand the nursing program
- Encourage and support Appalachian State in health care programs
- Build an allied health and science education center

Program/Curricular Delivery Issues

- Focus all 16 campuses on solving one problem – such as K-12 retention (potential name for initiative – UNC United)
- The job losses in the area necessitate an education that will compete at the global level, one that goes beyond the AA level.
- Graduate level education programs are not available.
- Higher education must be affordable and accessible. The new university would be for those who cannot afford to leave the area.
- Tough to get into any campus – if there was a campus in Hickory, it would create greater access
- Must commute to Charlotte or Boone for public higher education – need satellite campus at minimum
- There is a high dropout rate in the area that could be reduced if students saw the possibility of going to college near home.
- The new university should have a broad range of programs, including teaching, engineering, nursing and every program that every other state university offers; residence halls are important because a campus would draw from all over the state.
- Hickory area has highest concentration of women with children under age 6 who work. As the primary caretaker of their children, these women need accessible opportunities to enhance their education; region needs help from the University in the form of scholarships, grants, etc. to facilitate education access for this population of women.
- UNC system should explore innovative financial aid opportunities for students from low wealth backgrounds, such as Individual Development Accounts and Life Long Learning Accounts.
- University lacks ability to be “nimble” – to focus on needs of community, identify gaps and respond
- Many don't know what University campuses have to offer, and/or about University resources already exist in the community – need better communication, coordination, and marketing of UNC offerings and degrees (publicize) and advisement
- Community Colleges have been the sole provider of education in the region. Encourage 2+2 programs (ex: Associate of Applied Science).



- Need a performing arts center in Hickory – local public university would be an important partner
- Four areas for Appalachian State to concentrate on:
 - Classroom teacher shortage - ASU graduates more teachers than any other schools
 - Need for more nurses - Appalachian State poised and ready to address this problem
 - Viticulture for the growing regional wine industry
 - “Green” campus demonstration and environmental education
- Offer more programs in the following disciplines:
 - Engineering
 - Allied Health
 - Life sciences
 - Nursing
 - M-S teacher training
 - Computer science
 - Technology
 - Engineering in all specialties
 - Fiberoptics, optical engineering, prototyping
 - Logistics
- Key to a high quality workforce is seamless education system built on the principles of accessibility, affordability, and convenience. People currently commute more than one hour to access education. Cost of gas, tuition, and books prohibitive.
- Paradigm shift from paper to electronic records and pay for performance systems require a reorientation of teaching to reflect contemporary realities.

Environmental Issues

- UNC system needs to build upon the green efforts at ASU and spread them throughout the system.
- UNC system should devise green standards to reduce its impact on the environment.
- Integrate green principles & environmental literacy in the university curriculum.
- Help develop “green” business plans for industries
- Lead community-wide conservation efforts

Notable Quotes:

“UNC system needs to provide accessible, economical [education] for people who have the ‘burning’ [desire].”

“K-12 education needs to be on your priority list. They are your customers.”

“Classroom teacher shortage should be near the top of [our] list of needs.”



“We believe in regionalism.”

“If we are West of I-77, we do not get the news of what’s happening [in the UNC system].”

“If I am going to live in a diverse world, I want it to be an educated diverse world.”

“Having a UNC presence in Hickory is needed... [It] will make things possible for people who have no chance today.”

“No North Carolinian should receive less than our best.”

“The days of getting a good job without a good education are gone . . . We have to move education from ‘important’ to ‘essential’.”

“You folks [UNC] are in the possibility business. You can offer opportunities to our children and making solving our problems possible.”

“The past is no longer a good predictor of the future – change happens too rapidly.”

“We have to motivate our youth – they got the ‘burn’ but don’t get the ‘learn’.”

Detailed Summary compiled by:
Dr. Dennis Grady
UNC Tomorrow Scholars Council