

## **RESPONSE TO DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN**

### **Introduction**

This report serves as the UNC Association of Student Governments' official response to the January 16, 2013 draft strategic plan for the University of North Carolina system. It is guided by three overall themes and includes responses to specific aspects of the draft plan arranged in the order that they appear in the draft. This report is only a draft until adopted by the Association at its business meeting on January 25–27, 2013.

### **Themes of the Report**

#### **1. Student and Faculty Involvement**

The Association believes in the importance of shared governance. This document is guided by the principle of student and faculty involvement in decision-making at the planning, implementation, and assessment phases. Where the draft strategic plan outlines the creation of committees or working groups, the Association calls on University leaders to appoint student and faculty representatives to assist in their work.

#### **2. Intangible Benefits of Education**

The Association believes that there are intangible benefits of higher education, beyond better test scores and increased lifetime earnings. This should be reflected in the strategic plan and the University's approach to its implementation.

#### **3. Recognize Value Across Programs**

The Association believes that all academic programs have merit regardless of discipline, and believes that this should be reflected in the plan and the University's approach to allocating resources for research, scholarship, and instruction.

## **Response to Recommendations**

### **1. UNC Compact: Commitment to N.C.**

The Association supports the “UNC Compact” in the draft report. In November, our Committee on Academics and University Governance reviewed the statement and believes it reflects the University’s mission and values while balancing the interests of students and other stakeholders. However, the Association also believes that the statement should reference the role of students in shared governance in addition to that of faculty and staff.

### **2. Degree Attainment Goal**

The Association supports the University’s ambitious degree attainment goal as described in the plan and believes it represents a continuing commitment to the University’s constitutional mission. To that end, students adopted a resolution in favor of the goal in November. However, the University must continue to ensure the academic quality for which it is known while achieving this goal.

### **3. General Education Outcomes**

The Association supports the development of common student learning outcomes for general education provided these are developed and approved by the faculty with adequate student input. However, the Association does not support the creation of a common general education curriculum for the entire system. Such an outcome would undermine the varied missions of each campus, and may result in decreased academic quality.

### **4. Advising and Academic Support**

The Association supports expanded advising and academic support capacity across the University. In addition to the functionality described in the draft report, each institution’s electronic advising software should also allow students to generate a degree completion audit. However, the Association believes that the University should not only expand professional advising but also develop a plan to improve faculty advising. It is often the case that professional advisers can only counsel students on degree completion, not about the suitability of particular courses, majors, plans of study or career opportunities.

### **5. Research and Scholarship**

The Association is concerned about the draft’s dominant focus on research and scholarship in technology and applied sciences. While these are certainly important fields, students and faculty do research in a wide variety of fields including social sciences and the humanities. The Association believes that the strategic plan should acknowledge and support the value of scholarship in all fields.

## **6. Internships and Career Services**

The Association believes that the University must increase its commitment to internships and career services. Both students and business leaders have shown interest in better preparing students for the workforce. The Association supports the development of a system-wide internship portal and increased integration of career counseling and academic advising.

## **7. Student Learning Assessment**

The Association opposes using the Collegiate Learning Assessment or any single test to assess student learning outcomes. According to the draft report, the goal of assessment is to improve curriculum effectiveness and program quality. While this is a useful goal, the Collegiate Learning Assessment is a poor choice for the job.

The proposed test measures only critical thinking and communication skills, which means it provides no feedback on the specific topics of instruction in most academic programs. Moreover, performance on the test has been shown to have a direct correlation to performance on the SAT Reasoning Test. There are also concerns about the lack of incentives for students to perform well on the test.

The Association does not oppose assessing student learning outcomes, but believes that this should be guided by the faculty and done at the individual program level. The University should build on and publicize the results of the existing assessments each academic program already does to meet accreditation requirements.

## **8. Common Standard for Class Sizes**

The Association opposes standardizing class sizes across the University. Section size should be correlated with institution size and mission. Each campus should be accountable for teaching an appropriate number of credit hours relative to the size of its faculty. Enforcing standard section sizes will needlessly limit authority at the level where decision-makers are most familiar with student needs. Additionally, reducing the frequency with which courses are taught limits student access to courses that are required for graduation.

## **9. Consolidating Academic Programs**

The Association opposes the consolidation of academic programs as a means to achieve cost savings. The 2011 Program Duplication Study (Woodward Report) found that “the University does not have an ‘unnecessary program duplication’ problem at the current time.” Existing academic programs have been approved by the Board of Governors and are appropriate to institution size and mission.

It is important that undergraduates at every institution have the option to study not only math, science, and technology, but also languages, social sciences, fine arts, and the humanities. The

Association believes that academic program consolidation threatens these opportunities as well as multi- and inter-disciplinary programs.

However, if academic program consolidation is approved as a cost-savings measure, the Association believes that it must be done at the campus level with comprehensive student, alumni, and faculty input. Furthermore, current students must be allowed to complete the academic program in which they are enrolled without penalty.

#### **10. Increased Online Instruction**

The Association supports the development and expansion of online instruction, especially in gateway courses and those with high non-completion rates. The focus on improving instruction in these courses will benefit students and encourage more students to pursue majors in critical disciplines such as mathematics, science, and technology. Free online courses for all full-time students and an expanded catalogue of courses will give students greater flexibility in completing their degree. However, the Association does believe that the faculty must take the lead in the development and teaching of all courses, online or otherwise. Students should also be engaged in all aspects of the process, including selecting an online education platform and evaluating proposals for the new online courses outlined in the draft plan. Additionally, more research is needed to demonstrate that online instruction will be a source of new revenue.

#### **11. Increased Efficiency Savings**

The Association supports creating cost savings for the University by improving efficiency across the board. The proposals to centralize residency determination and financial aid review both seem like smart solutions if they can be implemented in a way that is consistent and expedient for all campuses and does not place an undue burden upon students and their families. Increased energy efficiency would not only create savings but is also environmentally responsible. Finally, carry-forward reform would incentivize the University to be a better steward of public funds.

#### **12. Keeping Education Affordable**

The Association supports the last section of the draft report, which offers a strong defense of accessibility and affordability. Specifically, the Association supports the development of a new four year plan that would lower the current cap on tuition and fee increases. The University has shown fiscal responsibility by increasing the number of graduates and decreasing the cost per degree during a budget crisis. Now it's time for the State to fulfill its end of the bargain and uphold North Carolina's constitutional mandate that "the benefits of the University of North Carolina ... as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the State free of expense."