Introduction: Why Look at Community and Economic Engagement

In developing its past two strategic plans, UNC heard from citizens across the state of North Carolina about what they wanted their public University to be and do. In the preparation of our strategic plan in 2007, “UNC Tomorrow,” we heard people ask us, during 39 public forums, to get more engaged in solving new community challenges our towns and counties and community groups had not faced before – new social service needs, a loss of community, shrinking tax bases, economies facing life “after the factories,” and populations that were, in the words of UNC-Chapel Hill demographer Jim Johnson, “graying and browning.” At the meetings, our citizens called out for a University that could address these real, difficult community challenges.

In 2012, as we prepared for the new strategic plan, “Our Time, Our Future,” we held eight “listening sessions,” with businesses, economic developers and elected officials who were recovering from the toughest recession in 75 years. What they wanted was a University that could deliver economic solutions. They asked that we be a University that discovered new products, processes and services and made it easy for companies in our state to commercialize them, a place that graduated students with the skills they needed to do the job and the habits of mind to help them think their way around challenges they ran into.

Responding to these requests – to get hands-on to address real-world community challenges; to graduate students who have workplace skills and the habits of mind to imagine or create the next big thing – is both old hat for some in our universities and a big new challenge for others.

On the one hand, delivering education that provides value to individuals and the state has been baked into the university’s mission since it was first established in the state constitution, with the charge that the learning we delivered should be “useful.” On the other hand, we are under greater pressure than ever to focus activities in the classroom. Doing more and better community and economic engagement, then, means finding ways we can use this engagement to enhance, not compromise, our three part mission of teaching, research and public service.
Development of this report

At the UNC Engagement Summit in May 2012, UNC President Tom Ross challenged campus engagement officers to work with UNC General Administration’s office of International, Community and Economic Engagement to develop a system-wide report that would be the first of its kind in the nation. This report, he said, should provide a means by which UNC could assess its “progress in community engagement and economic development,” two critically important and closely interconnected ways in which UNC students, faculty, staff, and alumni contribute to the quality of life in North Carolina.

We wanted to know where we are currently in our efforts to become more closely engaged; what progress we are making over time; and whether what we are doing is making a difference in our communities.

Two separate task forces began meeting to develop a small number of indicators that might enable UNC campuses, over time, to measure their individual progress in community and economic engagement. A “community engagement” task force, chaired by UNC Greensboro professor Emily Janke, director of the Institute for Community and Economic Engagement, was charged with identifying ways in which campuses were responding to the needs of their community, through teaching, research and public service. At the same time, another task force, focusing on “economic engagement” and chaired by UNC Greensboro’s Jerry McGuire, their associate vice chancellor for economic development, worked to identify a few indicators that would provide information about how campuses were interacting with outside business and other economic partners. Following several months of meetings, the two task forces were consolidated and developed a consensus strategy for a set of criteria we could use that would provide valuable information about campus efforts to engage with business and community partners.

In January 2013, the UNC Board of Governor’s report, “Our Time, Our Future”, called for campuses to move forward in identifying and collecting this information.

After a pilot phase collecting data for the first quarter of 2013, criteria were revised. Campuses began collecting data for this report in July 2013 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014.

Coming to consensus on which data we should collect was challenging. We can quantify with some specificity the overall “economic impact” of a university, as we did in the February 2015 report “Demonstrating the Collective Economic Value of the University of North Carolina
System” (finding we had created $27.9 billion in net economic value, equivalent to 426,052 jobs) and the increment to someone’s lifetime earnings from receiving a four year degree (according to Economic Modeling Specialists, International, $1,103,440 more, on average, when compared to someone receiving a high school degree), but there is no consensus national standard for what an “engaged university” looks like and how to quantify its value.

We know that the majority of our campuses have been designated “engaged universities” under criteria developed by the Carnegie Foundation and a majority of our campuses have been named to the “honor roll” of the national President’s Higher Education Community Service (presented by the Corporation for National and Community Service) based on a different set of “engagement” criteria. Ongoing conversations continue at meetings of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities about what criteria campuses should use to assess and quantify their ability to engage the community. And while community and public service is now one of the five elements of institutional effectiveness in reaffirmation reports submitted to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) (Standard 3.3.1.5), there is no agreement on how to define, measure or improve university engagement. [Appendix C presents further detail on the rationale behind the final measures.]

Another challenge was funding. Campuses have not collected much of this data in the past, and most had no existing staff or built in mechanisms for collecting it. Decisions about what data to collect, then, were based in part on what would be possible to collect without additional resources. Finally, we must offer a caveat and bit of a disclaimer: As this was our first time collecting much of this data, there may have been misunderstandings about definitions of metrics, terms, etc., at the campus level. While every attempt was made to completely and accurately record and report the data, not all individual counts or total figures may be 100% correct. Thus, these indicators are meant to provide understanding about scope and trends, not to fully capture and describe all related activities, though we expect consistency of data to improve in future reports.

We hope over time there will be national consensus about how to assess engagement, and that there will be support for more sophisticated means of collecting data about it. In the meantime, we at UNC believe it is important to get started. Our first steps, as Janke outlines in *Rekindle*...
and Recapture the Love: Establishing System-wide Indicators of Progress in Community Engagement and Economic Development (2014), were to create criteria against which to guide the choice of metrics and measures in our larger effort to identify indicators of progress, even as we strive toward painting more complete portraits of our institution’s individual and collective contributions. Our communities and our state look to our universities to provide them with smart graduates with strong skills and sharp minds, with insightful faculty and staffers, all with a commitment to engage with our communities in solving some of our state’s biggest challenges.

Done right, the work of a university on community and economic engagement creates a “ripple” effect throughout our state, and we become what Albert Coates once described as a “magic gulf stream flowing in an ever-widening current through the lives of people in the cities.” It ripples through the lives of people in our universities as well. Studies show that, done right, engagement helps students learn better, leading to improved retention, degree completion, connections to faculty, participation in community service following graduation and other outcomes. This report represents a first attempt to begin trying to focus our engagement and do it right.

The University is a “magic gulf stream flowing in an ever-widening current through the lives of people in the cities.”

Albert Coates, “What the University of North Carolina Meant to Me,” 1969
Executive Summary

If universities ever were “ivory towers,” intimidating citadels walled off from the surrounding community, they aren’t anymore. Access has gotten easier. Range has been extended.

It had to happen. These days, universities are expected not just to educate 18-24 year olds on campus about static sets of printed page subject matter, but to provide lifelong learning opportunities to students of all ages in dynamic engaged learning, blending theory and application about a dynamic, relentlessly expanding world. We are asked not only to conduct fundamental research and produce scholarly thinking that expands the bounds of knowledge, but to translate that research into new products, processes and technologies and to apply that knowledge to solve immediate challenges our businesses and communities face. And we are asked not just to take on public service projects that we learn from, but to collaborate with communities to learn and work together.

The University of North Carolina system’s campuses are doing all that. Consider:

- UNC performs community engagement projects, extension work, and business consulting projects in every county of the state;
- The average age for UNC’s enrolled students is nearly 24 years old;
- More UNC “students” are taking continuing education courses than traditional credit-bearing courses;
- UNC interacts with more than 6 million North Carolinians each year, only 220,000 of whom are full-time students.

By the national measures that we have, UNC campuses appear to be measuring up well in community and economic engagement. Twelve campuses (Appalachian State, East Carolina, Elizabeth City State, NC A&T State, NC Central, NC State, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, UNC Pembroke, UNC Wilmington and Western Carolina) are currently recognized by the Carnegie Foundation as “engaged universities,” a recognition of how well they collaborate with outside constituencies and community representatives, tying the California State System for the largest number of universities. Ten campuses were recognized this year (East Carolina, Fayetteville State, NC Central, NC State, UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, UNC Pembroke, UNC Wilmington and Western Carolina) on the national President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for their “exemplary community
service.” East Carolina’s “Middle School Innovators Academy,” NC State’s “Backpacks to Briefcases,” and the UNC system’s “REACH NC” have won awards from the national University Economic Developers Association for their projects connecting their universities to the needs of the broader economic development community.

But while a number of organizations are attempting to develop a set of national standards to assess community engagement, there is no consensus on what those standards should be. Universities collect data episodically in preparation for seeking new grants, recognition or accreditation, but not consistently.

This report represents the beginning of an effort launched by UNC President Tom Ross, championed by the UNC Engagement Council and UNC Economic Transformation Council and endorsed by the UNC Board of Governors in its strategic plan, “Our Time, Our Future,” which asked UNC to develop an “Annual Engagement Report.”

Report Findings

1. **Teaching: Getting students ready to hit the ground running**

   For students in for-credit courses, UNC campuses are balancing teaching specific skills and specific sets of knowledge with preparing students to move into a world of constant change. Through “applied learning” experiences and “entrepreneurship” courses and opportunities, universities are working to get students ready to “hit the ground running” following graduation and to be ready when the destination changes. In health care and education, campuses are responding to known “demand” through degree programs.

   *Developing applied learning opportunities:* In response to requests from businesses across the state, “Our Time, Our Future” proposed that UNC receive support for efforts to spur “growth in experiential learning opportunities for students…prior to their graduation.” While there has been no funding support for these efforts, campuses are offering a number of courses that provide students and faculty opportunities to interact with corporate, business, nonprofit and government entities in settings that provide students hands-on opportunities to apply what they are learning outside the classroom. In 2013-2014, there were 65,277 enrollments in such classes at UNC.

   *Creating entrepreneurial graduates:* To better prepare students for an uncertain future, in the past seven years, UNC campuses have increased their capacity to enable more
students to learn the basic principles of entrepreneurship. In 2013-2014, nine campuses offered majors, minors, master’s or certificates in entrepreneurship and 365 students received these degrees. Perhaps more importantly, twelve campuses have developed organized entrepreneurial initiatives to connect students and faculty to information, courses, practical experience or investment opportunities.

*Meeting demand in the growth sectors of health care and education:* The number of people UNC is producing in two of our state’s most important job sectors, health care and education, has changed over the past five years. In health care, the number of people graduating with health care degrees is up 26% among undergraduates, 20% among master’s students and 17% for those with doctoral degrees. According to a new database available through the NC Department of Commerce (which does not track federal employment, self-employment or out of state employment), 79.4% of UNC undergraduate health care degree holders are working at North Carolina organizations a year after graduation, and 57.3% of those are working at health care-related concerns in the state. Among UNC graduate health care degree holders, 64.2% are working in North Carolina a year after graduation and 41% are working specifically in North Carolina health care-related jobs. Percentages vary by campus, but it is worth noting that at Winston-Salem State, 76.5% of undergraduate health care degree holders and 66.7% of graduate health care degree holders work in North Carolina health care-related entities a year after graduating.

As the Board of Governors has noted, the number of UNC students receiving teacher licensure has declined significantly over the past five years with greater drops among currently-enrolled students. NC Department of Commerce data shows that graduating students with degrees in education are highly likely to work in education in North Carolina: about 75% of undergraduate and graduate degree holders are working in the field of education in North Carolina schools and companies within a year of graduation. Another 12% of those degree holders are working in North Carolina companies, in some cases performing educational functions. Students with undergraduate education degrees from UNC Pembroke most often match degrees to jobs in the state (82.8% work in NC

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“We must never lose our clear focus on the University’s duty to contribute to the common good, to develop leaders for our communities and to serve those communities in ways that enhance the quality of life for the people who live in them.”

UNC President Tom Ross, inaugural address, 2007
education jobs) and Elizabeth City State University students with education graduate degrees most often match (92.7% working in NC education jobs).

2. Research: The Impact of UNC Research on North Carolina's Economy and Communities

Every year since 2003, UNC has performed more than $1 billion in sponsored research. Much of that research is closely tied to sectors essential to our state’s economic future, and increasing amounts of that research are being done in partnership with North Carolina government, organizations and businesses.

Targeted research investment: UNC is working closely with economic development and governmental entities to increase the amount of research on topics identified as being particularly important to North Carolina’s economic future. The most recent example is the Research Opportunities Initiative (ROI), recommended in “Our Time, Our Future” and funded by the General Assembly to provide support for “game changing research” in advanced manufacturing, coastal and marine science, data science, defense, energy and pharmacoengineering. But UNC system faculty members are doing research in a variety of fields important to the state, performing more than $300 million worth of research in FY 2013-2014 in both biological sciences and health professions and more than $85 million each in engineering, education and agriculture. Beyond this, new steps to commercialize research through individual campus initiatives and Gov. McCrory’s “Innovation to Jobs Task Force” are well under way.

Research investment in the community: As part of this report, the UNC Office of Research and Graduate Education collected new data to determine what portion of research was targeted toward “community engagement” or North Carolina-based institutions. Campus reports indicate that during 2013-2014, about 20% of UNC research projects involved some sort of collaboration between UNC and their “communities” for mutual benefit.

During the same time period, UNC campuses reported receiving nearly $96 million in research funding from state government and another $6 million from local government entities; $75 million from North Carolina foundations, associations and nonprofits; and $97 million from businesses, about $22 million of which comes from North Carolina businesses.
3. **Public Service: Building the ‘Communiversity’**

UNC campuses are bringing their work closer to the community. Universities conduct community projects in every county, bringing together thousands of faculty students and community members each year to work together to solve community challenges. State-serving university entities touch millions of citizens and help thousands of community groups and businesses annually. And continuing education programs bring university expertise to hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians annually, both face-to-face and online.

**University-community partnerships:** We asked campuses to report between 15 and 25 community-university partnerships that were active during FY 2013-2014. The partnerships campuses highlighted involved work in all 100 counties, with Cumberland, Guilford, Durham, Mecklenburg and Robeson counties most frequently mentioned, each with at least 30 such efforts. The projects reported included about 25,000 community members, 55,000 students, and 2,000 faculty and staff, and involved all three parts of the university's mission: teaching, research and public service. The areas of focus for these projects were most often work with nonprofits and educational institutions, followed by partnerships with government and business.

**Work performed by state-serving entities:** There are hundreds of initiatives underway on UNC campuses that focus on addressing regional needs.

This report focused attention on five larger “state-serving” entities: the Cooperative Extension Service, the Industrial Extension Service, the North Carolina Area Health Education Centers, the School of Government, and the Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC)

These entities serve literally millions of North Carolinians. Cooperative Extension tracked more than 6 million citizen contacts last year and nearly 600,000 people participated in their noncredit degree programs in agriculture, food and 4-H youth development. Industrial Extension worked with small-and medium-sized manufacturers in 44 counties to help them revise their processes and increase productivity. The North Carolina Area Health Education Centers trained, supported and placed more than 280,000 health care professionals throughout the state. The UNC School of Government offered 186 different courses to
more than 16,000 North Carolina public officials last year and responded to more than 15,000 phone calls. The SBTDC helped 6,856 clients in all 100 counties start up or expand: developing business plans, increasing exports and access to markets, getting management training, and creating or retaining jobs.

Noncredit education: Other entities throughout the system deliver a range of other courses that help people acquire new skills and knowledge that make them more productive workers, volunteers or community members. Last year, UNC campuses delivered more than 7,000 continuing education courses – either face-to-face or partially online - with more than 923,000 enrollments, with course times built around the needs of the community. An increasing number of these courses are delivered online: last year there were more than 466,000 enrollments in these online courses alone.

Report recommendations

1. Continue listening to and responding to the needs of the workforce and the community in developing curriculum.
   - Develop strategies to more effectively count experiential learning activity
   - Expand experiential learning opportunities
   - Encourage continued expansion of entrepreneurial opportunities for students
   - Work with state leaders to expand UNC responsiveness to workforce needs in key economic sectors

2. Expand community connections in research
   - Support research on important sectors of the North Carolina economy through expansion of the ROI program
   - Encourage campuses to continue to increase industry-sponsored and community-based research by UNC campuses
   - Support the translation of research for community and economic benefit

3. Build quality and number of community-university collaborations and noncredit courses
   - Improve information collection methods for university-community partnerships to ensure awareness of these partnerships on campus, among community partners and between campuses
• Invite state-serving engagement entities to present to appropriate Board of Governors’ committees regularly
• Improve awareness and visibility of noncredit education at UNC
• Continue to support UNC Engagement Council efforts to collect data, leverage resources, and communicate findings to improve campus engagement

The future of reporting in these areas
The report, the result of more than two years of discussions and work by UNC campuses, doesn’t answer all questions about engagement by our campuses with their communities, but it does provide some preliminary insights about which efforts we believe are important, and sets the stage for campuses to be able to compare their efforts year-to-year, to set goals and standards and, over time, to compare themselves to peer institutions. It also is intended to give the citizens, communities and companies we serve additional information about the variety of ways our universities can work with them.