



UNC SYSTEM FEDERAL PRIORITIES FOR 119th CONGRESS

The UNC System's commitment to expanding access, affordability, and student success

The UNC System is an economic engine for North Carolina — with 16 public universities from the mountains to the sea and one of the nation's best math and science high schools — all cultivating talent and driving innovation. This year, the UNC System's universities are serving more students than ever — nearly a quarter of a million people — delivering rigorous, affordable education and a remarkable return on investment to both graduates and the public. Bucking national trends, North Carolina's public universities are growing and thriving. Graduation rates are up, student debt is down, and long-term outcomes for graduates are stronger than ever.

Key facts:

- The UNC System is focused on access and affordability. There have been *no tuition increases* for North Carolina undergraduates for nine years. The state also provides generous financial aid to families who earn \$80,000 or less through the NEXT NC scholarship.
 - The UNC System enrolls about 250,000 students, including 10,000 who transferred from the state's community colleges and 21,000 military-affiliated students.
 - Debt is falling among UNC System graduates — 50 percent of North Carolina students graduated with federal student loan debt in 2024, compared to 61 percent five years ago. Meanwhile, four-year graduation rates are climbing and consistently surpass the national average.
 - UNC degrees continue to deliver strong returns, according to a 2023 independent study. Graduates of North Carolina's public universities earn an average \$500,000 income premium compared to those who do not attend, and the premium is nearly \$1 million for those who earn advanced degrees.
 - The same study found that nearly 90 percent of low-income graduates experience upward economic mobility, upholding the university's core promise of life-changing opportunity.
 - The UNC System is a research powerhouse, bringing in \$2.2 billion in grants and funded research in 2023, advancing the frontiers of science and bolstering local economies.
 - Each year, UNC institutions graduate thousands of engineers, health professionals, teachers, and other essential workers to meet the needs of a growing, complex economy in North Carolina and across the country.
 - UNC Health operates 19 hospitals and an extensive health care network across the state, providing broad access to lifesaving care.
 - The UNC System serves the state in countless other ways — including PBS North Carolina, the North Carolina Arboretum, and the museums, planetariums, and sports and performance venues that enrich North Carolina's cultural life.
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The importance of deregulation

- Regulation and oversight in higher education are important to ensuring accountability for federal dollars.
- Every year, however, new statutory and regulatory requirements are imposed on colleges, adding real costs at a time when institutions are being asked to tighten their belts.
- Congress and the executive branch should decide what is critical to federal oversight and taxpayers and then limit new reporting and related regulatory requirements to those areas, as overly burdensome reporting requirements only add to institutions' bottom lines — a particular hardship for smaller, under-resourced colleges.

Federal research is key to U.S. competitiveness

- **Innovation:** Sustained growth in public research funding is necessary to ensure that the United States retains its status as the global leader in innovative sectors such as artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology, and cybersecurity, which help address the needs of North Carolina and the nation.
 - UNC System institutions rely on important partnerships with the nation's federal research agencies, including The National Institute of Health (NIH), The National Science Foundation (NSF), The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), The Department of Defense (DOD), The Department of Education (DOE), The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- **Research security:** UNC System institutions take research security seriously and are actively implementing controls to comply with federal disclosure requirements of various research collaborations.
 - Any new research security initiative should not become a hindrance to healthy research collaborations, or add overly burdensome reporting requirements, which can create financial hardships, particularly for smaller, under-resourced institutions.

Campus-based aid

- The UNC System will continue to deliver on the promise to provide affordable, accessible, and high-quality education to all North Carolinians with support from Congress on the following federal programs:
 - Nearly 70,000 UNC System students benefit from federal **Pell Grants**. The percentage of students relying on the grants ranges from 25% to as high as 65% at some UNC System institutions.
 - More than 12,400 UNC System students rely upon **Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG)**, which benefit the neediest students.
 - More than 5,000 UNC System students receive funding from **Federal Work-Study (FWS)**.
 - UNC System students also benefit from **TRIO, GEAR UP, Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN), Student Success Completion, and Basic Needs grants**.

Other important initiatives

- **Pathfinder Airborne Program**
 - UNC institutions continue to partner with the Army Futures Command and operational commands at Fort Bragg such as the XVIII Airborne Corps, to develop soldier-led innovations.
 - The UNC System seeks continued programmatic funding for this partnership, which has been consistently funded in the Department of Defense appropriations bill for the last five years.
 - Five UNC System campuses are now engaged in Pathfinder Airborne projects (East Carolina University, N.C. Agricultural and Technical State University, NC State University, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and University of North Carolina at Charlotte).
- **Military student benefit systems**
 - The UNC System prioritizes efficient and effective delivery of benefits to a growing military-affiliated student body.
 - Congress should support legislation that makes a college degree more accessible to military-affiliated students, while resisting efforts that increase red tape and bureaucracy.
- **Historically Minority-Serving Institutions (HMSIs)**
 - The UNC System's five Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and one Native American-Serving Nontribal Institution (NASNTI), UNC Pembroke, make significant contributions to the state's economy through affordable academic offerings, research, and partnerships that serve the community and region.
 - Support funding for HBCUs and NASNTIs, as well as the new Department of Education research infrastructure program for minority-serving institutions.