

January 28, 2026 at 1 p.m.  
Via Videoconference and PBS North Carolina Livestream  
UNC System Office  
223 S. West Street, Board Room (17<sup>th</sup> Floor)  
Raleigh, North Carolina

## AGENDA

### OPEN SESSION

- A-1. Approval of the Minutes of November 19, 2025.....Joel Ford
- A-2. NC College Connect.....Shun Robertson and Patti Harris
- A-3. Reaching North Carolina’s High-Achieving Students ..... Chancellor Karrie Dixon, NC Central University  
Chancellor Sharon Gaber, UNC Charlotte
- A-4. Adjourn

## DRAFT MINUTES

November 19, 2025 at 1 p.m.  
Via Videoconference and PBS North Carolina Livestream  
UNC System Office  
223 S. West Street, Board Room  
Raleigh, North Carolina

This meeting of the Committee on Strategic Initiatives was presided over by Chair Joel Ford. The following committee members, constituting a quorum, were also present in person: John Fraley, Pearl Burris-Floyd, Gene Davis, and Javier Limon. Swadesh Chatterjee joined via videoconference.

Chancellors participating were Heather Norris, Franklin Gilliam, and Aswani Volety.

Staff members present included Shun Robertson and others from the UNC System Office.

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### 1. Call to Order and Approval of Open Session Minutes (Item A-1)

The chair called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. on Wednesday, November 19, 2025. The open session minutes from the September 17, 2025, meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

### 2. Educator Preparation Updates (Item A-2)

Dr. Ashton Clemmons, associate vice president for P12 strategy and policy, provided programmatic highlights on the System's P-12 initiatives, including the North Carolina Teaching Fellows, North Carolina Principal Fellows, and the Future Teachers of North Carolina programs. Dr. Clemmons noted highlights from each program including participation growth in the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program and success rates of North Carolina Principal Fellows. She provided an update on the System's continued work on the science of reading and early literacy programs, including the creation of a literacy hub for K-12 educators developed by the institutions' distinguished professors. Finally, Dr. Clemmons provided an update on newly launched efforts to develop a math instructional framework to be used across the System.

### 3. Strengthening Mental Health Education: A Strategic Investment in Mental Health (Item A-3)

Dr. Suzie Baker, assistant vice president for student affairs, provided an update on research that has been conducted to determine mental health challenges through the Healthy Minds Study. Dr. Baker also discussed K-12 student mental health trends and early intervention strategies including the Mental Health First Aid Training Curriculum. She noted that students participating in North Carolina Teaching Fellows and North Carolina Principal

Fellows, and educators in laboratory school have received Mental Health First Aid training, along with students enrolled in early college high schools.

#### **4. Best Practices for Healthy Achievement Culture (A-4)**

Ms. Lori Newnam, dean of counseling at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, shared how the school has thoughtfully deployed initiatives to ensure sustainable student achievement practices. Some of these practices included the elimination of class rank and valedictorians; requiring students to participate in campus service opportunities so they connect and develop a campus community; and mandating service learning and physical health activities to nurture student mental wellbeing. Finally, Ms. Newnam provided an overview of the school's focus on resiliency education.

There being no further business and without objection, the meeting adjourned at 2:03 p.m.

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Swadesh Chatterjee, Secretary

## AGENDA ITEM

A-2. NC College Connect .....Shun Robertson and Patti Harris

**Situation:** The traditional college application process can be overwhelming for many students. Numerous forms, essay submissions, recommendation letters, and costly application fees often pose significant hurdles for high school seniors. In partnership with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI), North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA), College Foundation Inc. (CFI), Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs North Carolina (GEAR UP NC), and College for North Carolina (CFNC), the UNC System launched Phase II of NC College Connect in fall 2025. This phase enabled qualifying students to bypass the traditional application process and receive direct admission offers to participating universities and colleges. The program's goal is to reduce barriers to higher education, expand access to college, and simplify the application process for students across North Carolina.

**Background:** In September 2024, the UNC System introduced NC College Connect, a streamlined college application process specifically designed for North Carolina public high school seniors who meet the UNC System's minimum eligibility requirements. This innovative program aims to simplify the admissions process for academically qualified students by providing access to the 11 participating UNC System institutions, several North Carolina independent colleges and universities, and all 58 community colleges, allowing them to bypass the traditional application process and make enrollment decisions sooner.

The program is open to North Carolina public high school seniors who finish their junior year with a weighted GPA of 2.8 or above. Students must also meet the minimum course requirements designated in Section 700.1.1 of the UNC Policy Manual, *Policy on Minimum Eligibility Requirements for Undergraduate Admission for the University of North Carolina System*. To remain eligible, students must maintain this GPA throughout their senior year, meet North Carolina's high school graduation requirements, and continue to satisfy the UNC System's minimum eligibility and course requirements.

**Assessment:** In fall 2025, over 70,000 eligible seniors were notified of their eligibility for direct admissions via an official first-class letter, including a QR code and a link to [NCCollegeConnect.org](https://nccollegeconnect.org). Through the NC College Connect portal, students saw a tailored list of colleges, reflecting the institutions to which they had been offered admission. UNC System Office staff will provide updated data on the program.

**Action:** This item is for information only.



# EASING PRESSURE POINTS IN THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

Committee on Strategic Initiatives  
January 28, 2026

# The College Admissions Landscape is Competitive

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## Colleges now have to prove their value to applicants, not just the other way around

As enrollment declines, policy shifts, and technology evolves, institutions are being forced to rethink their admissions approach.

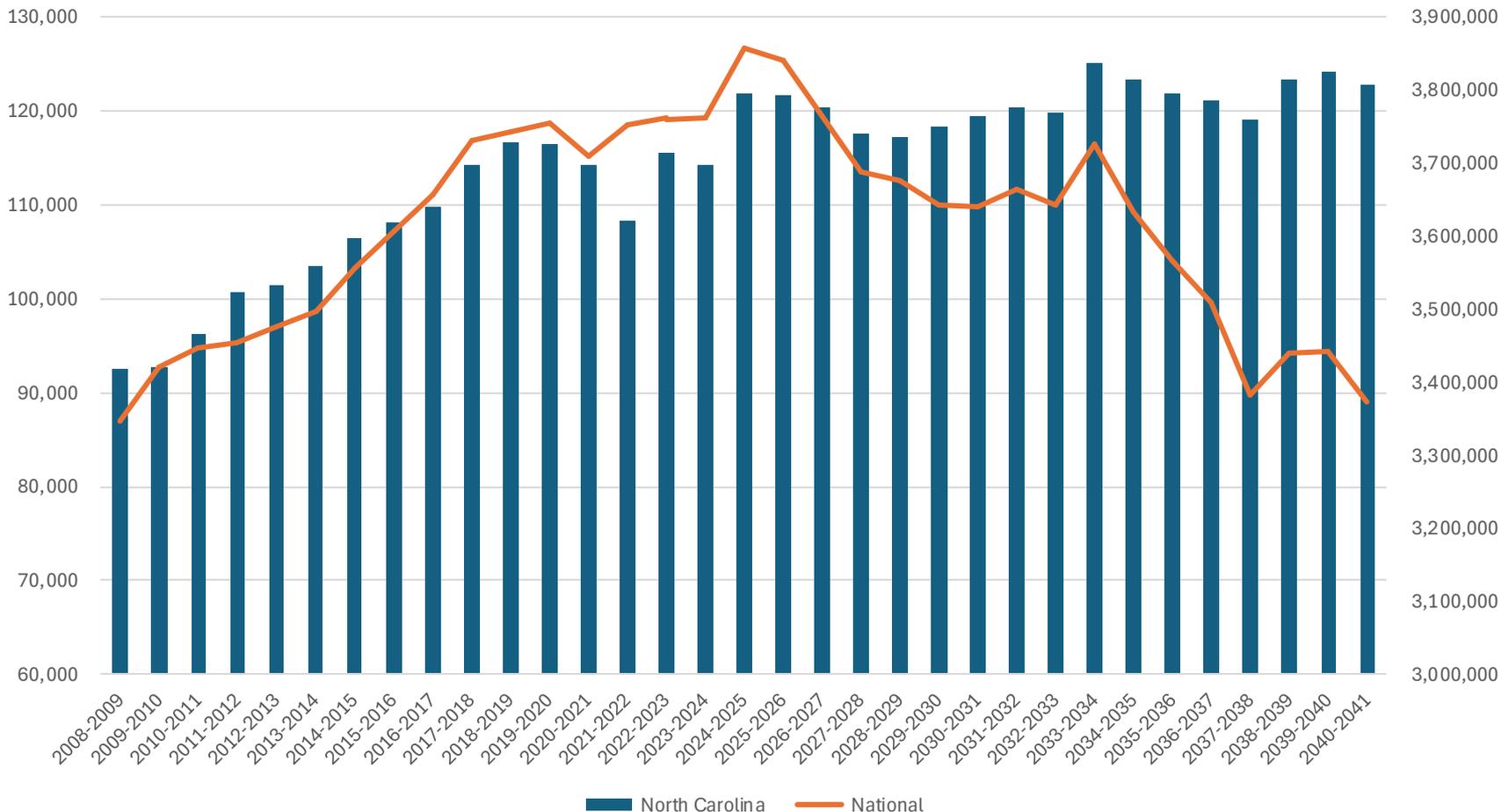


## The Southern College Boom

How SEC universities became enrollment winners by selling sunshine, football, and a particular vision of college life.

# The “Enrollment Cliff” is Not Nearly as Steep in North Carolina as it is Nationally...

Comparing North Carolina vs. National High School Graduates



# ...But Other States and Institutions are Recruiting NC students

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“ “  
Nine out of 10 of the states that saw the largest growth in undergraduate enrollment since fall 2020 were states in which officials over the last five years purposefully increased recruitment efforts to offset the demographic cliff, including Virginia, Maryland, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, North Carolina, Minnesota and Connecticut. Of the nine states, Virginia, Maryland and Illinois' enrollment increased the largest at 520, 212 and 54 students, respectively, per enrollment data.

WICHE's report also projected the South will see an overall gain of high school graduates by 3 percent between 2023 and 2041. Of the 21 states and regions Goff mentioned recruitment efforts in, WICHE predicted D.C., South Carolina, North Carolina and Texas would have the largest increase in high school graduation rates at 31 percent, 14 percent, 6 percent and 5 percent, respectively.

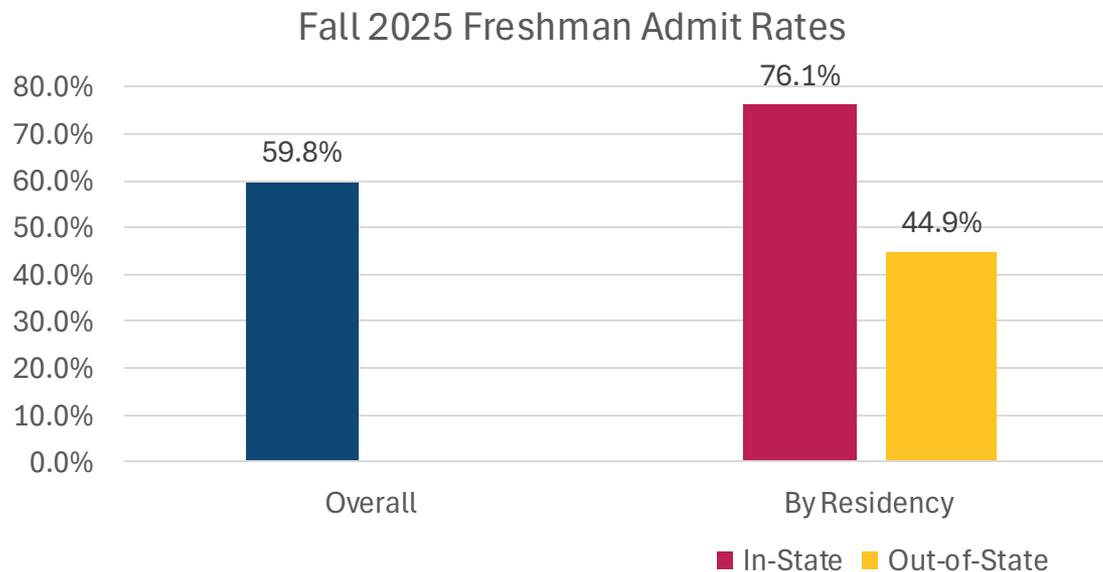
” ”

# Our Primary Obligation is to NC Students

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“The General Assembly shall provide that **the benefits of The University of North Carolina** and other public institutions of higher education, as far as practicable, be extended to the **people of the State** free of expense.”

- North Carolina Constitution, Article IX, Sec 9

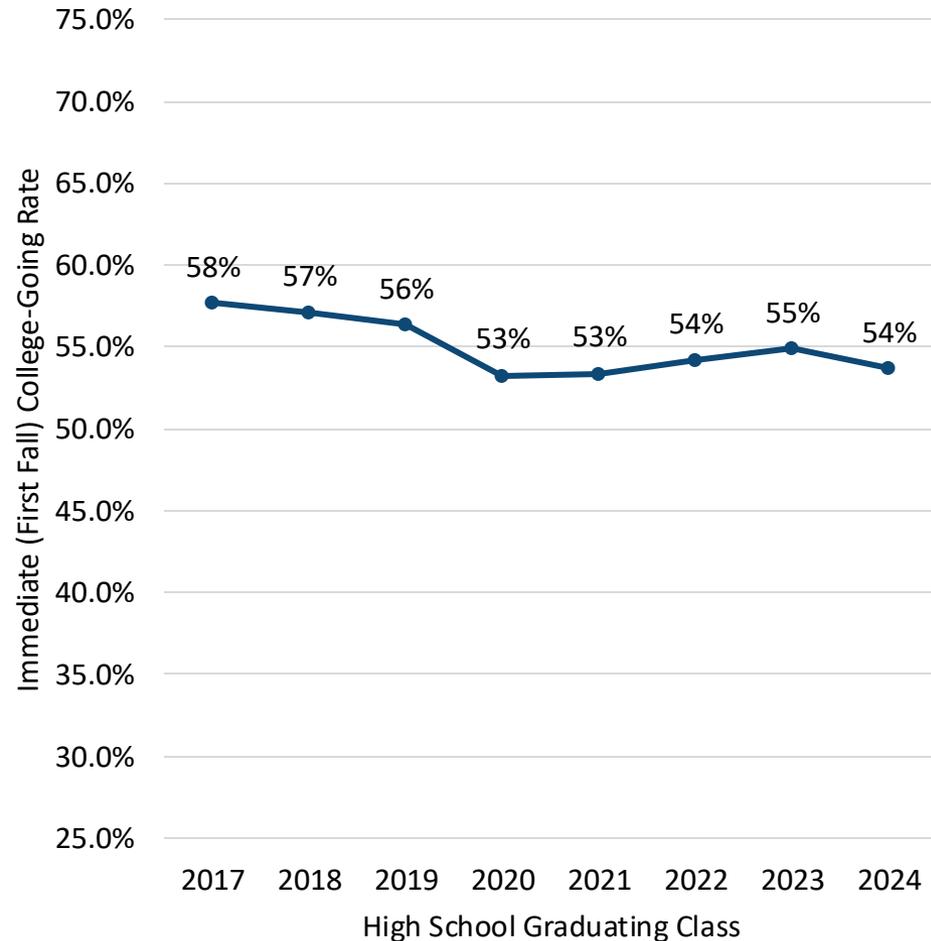


# A Little Over Half of NC High School Graduates Enroll in College Immediately After Graduation

NC Public High School Class of 2024

Immediate Fall Destination	Number of Students	Percent of Graduating Class	Total College-Going Rate
UNC System	25K	24%	54%
NCCCS	22K	20%	
In-State Private 4-Year/Other	5K	4%	
Out-of-State	7K	6%	
Did not Enroll	51K	46%	
Total Graduates	110K		

NC Public HS Graduates College-Going Rate

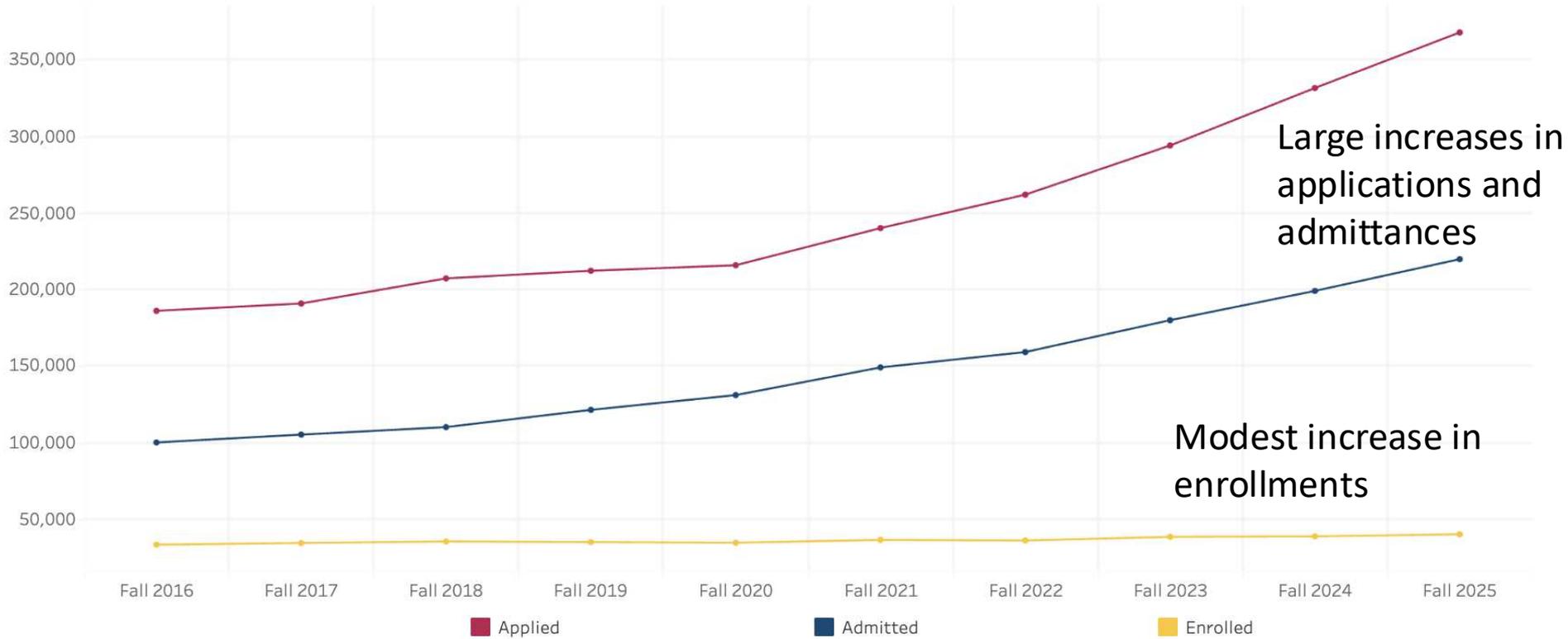


# And Students are Feeling the Pressure

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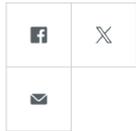
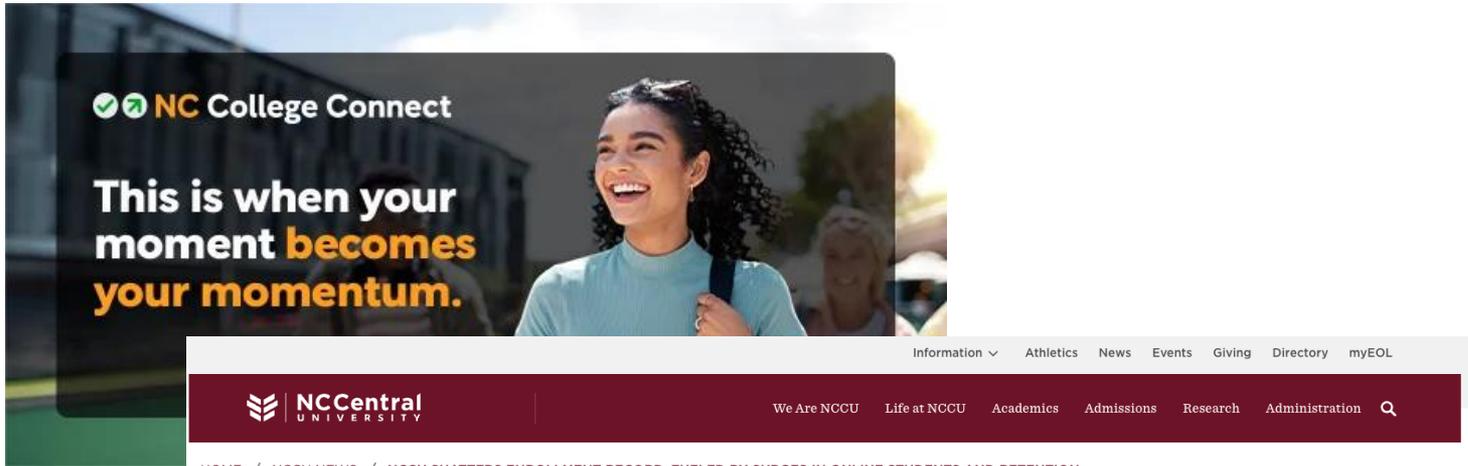
- Recent NACAC survey shows
  - More than **three-quarters (77%)** of young adults feel the college admission process is complex
  - More than **half (52%)** say it has been more stressful than anything else they have done academically
  - **Three in five (61%)** have been overwhelmed by the advice they have been given related to applying to college

Institution(s): All  
 Applied, Admitted, Enrolled Counts by Entering Fall Term



	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
Applied	186,038	190,837	207,227	212,212	215,805	240,055	261,887	293,980	331,505	367,779
Admitted	100,134	105,269	110,154	121,414	131,050	149,111	159,148	179,941	199,065	219,775
Enrolled	33,420	34,522	35,537	35,133	34,700	36,535	36,145	38,529	38,837	40,200
Admit Rate (Admitted/Applied)	53.8%	55.2%	53.2%	57.2%	60.7%	62.1%	60.8%	61.2%	60.0%	59.8%
Yield Rate (Enrolled/Admitted)	33.4%	32.8%	32.3%	28.9%	26.5%	24.5%	22.7%	21.4%	19.5%	18.3%

# Relieving the Pressure



## NCCU Shatters Enrollment Record, Fueled by Surges in Online Students and Retention

By NCCU Office of Co  
Posted September 03,

### Inside UNC Charlotte

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## Charlotte introduces AI and construction engineering degrees to meet workforce demands, drive innovation

September 22, 2025

Categories: General News



# **MAKING THE CASE FOR STAYING IN NORTH CAROLINA**

# NC College Connect



Dear [NAME],

Congratulations! We are pleased to inform you that you have been offered **direct admission** to the below UNC System universities, North Carolina independent colleges and universities, and North Carolina community colleges for the **2026–2027** academic year through the NC College Connect program.

- Appalachian State University
- Barton College
- Belmont Abbey College\*
- Bennett College\*
- Brevard College
- Campbell University
- Catawba College
- Chowan University
- East Carolina University
- Elizabeth City State University
- Fayetteville State University
- Gardner–Webb University\*
- Greensboro College
- Guilford College
- Johnson C. Smith University\*
- Lees–McRae College
- Lenoir–Rhyne University\*
- Livingstone College
- Louisburg College
- Mars Hill University\*
- Meredith College\*
- Methodist University
- Mid-Atlantic Christian University
- Montreat College
- North Carolina Central University
- North Carolina Wesleyan University
- Pfeiffer University
- Saint Augustine's University
- Salem College\*
- Shaw University
- University of Mount Olive
- University of North Carolina at Asheville
- University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- University of North Carolina at Pembroke
- Warren Wilson College
- Western Carolina University
- William Peace University
- Wingate University\*
- Winston–Salem State University
- [Community College]

**Ready to meet your moment?** Since you currently meet the NC College Connect requirements and your weighted GPA is 2.8 or higher\*\*, you are now **eligible for admission to select North Carolina colleges and universities**—without a traditional application, essay, or recommendation letter. We applaud your hard work and dedication during high school, and now we encourage you to reap the benefits.



\* These colleges and universities have additional requirements for a student to qualify for direct admission. These requirements will be noted in each institution's NC College Connect form.  
\*\* All college and university admission is conditional, based on your final high school transcript, GPA, and other graduation and NC College Connect requirements, which can be found on the FAQ page at [nccollegeconnect.com](https://nccollegeconnect.com). Meeting NC College Connect requirements means meeting course requirements and any additional criteria required by individual institutions, as well as responding to safety questions to show a student meets the institutions' safety requirements. You can access NC College Connect requirements via the QR code on the next page.

- Offers North Carolina public high school students with a weighted GPA of 2.8 and above direct admission to select participating colleges and universities
- Phase II of the program included full education sector participation including 11 UNC System institutions
- Program Window: August 1, 2025 – January 2, 2026
- Over 88,000 forms submitted
- 34% participation (70,130 total eligible students)

# Why NC College Connect

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- ✓ **Clear acceptance early** → reduces uncertainty and “waiting game” stress
- ✓ **Fewer applications needed** → less time, cost, and decision fatigue
- ✓ **Simplifies the process** → less pressure around essays and deadlines
- ✓ **Boosts confidence & belonging** → students feel wanted before they even apply

# Collaboration is Key

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NORTH CAROLINA  
INDEPENDENT  
COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

NC COMMUNITY  
COLLEGES  
CREATING SUCCESS

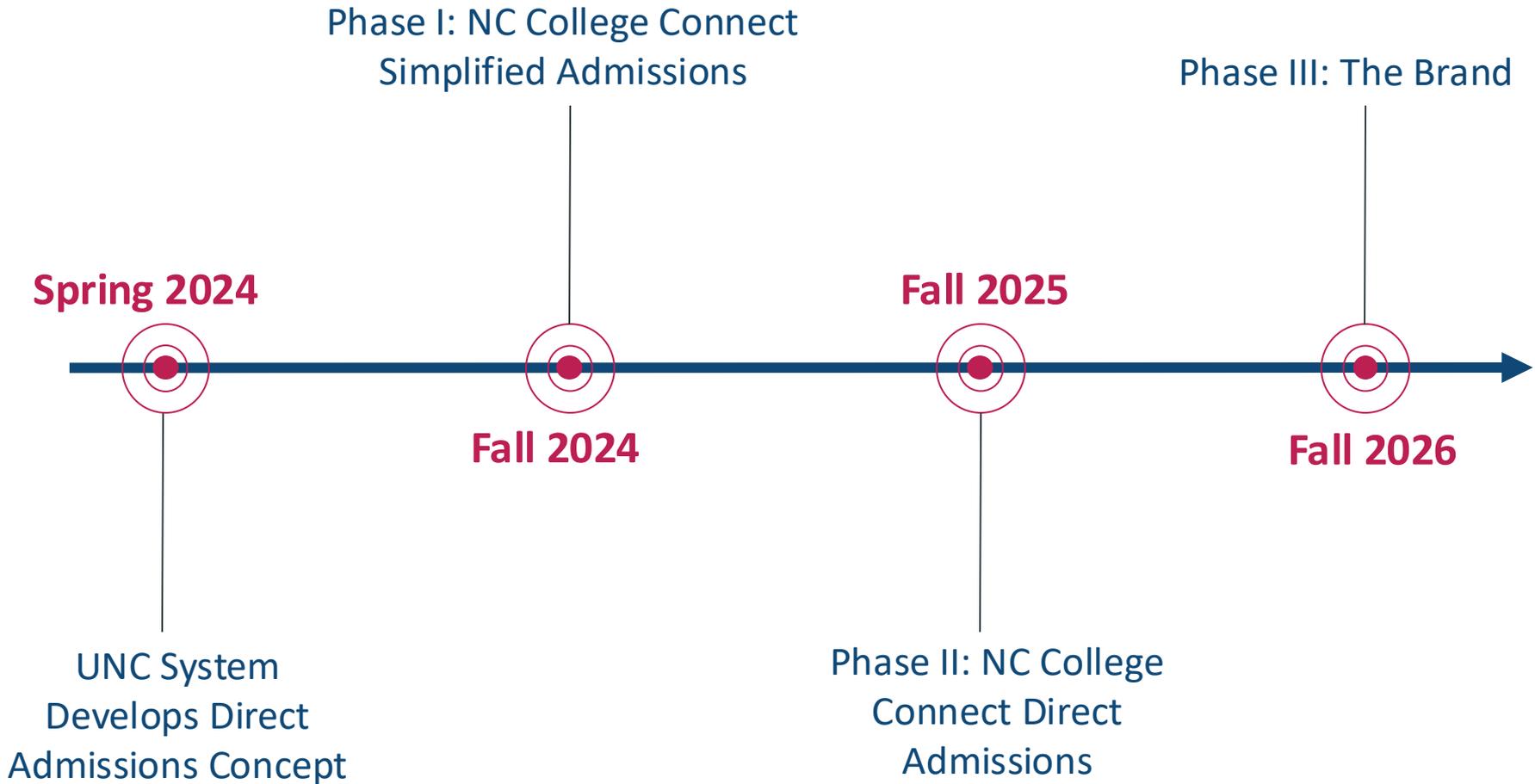


# UNC System Institutional Partners

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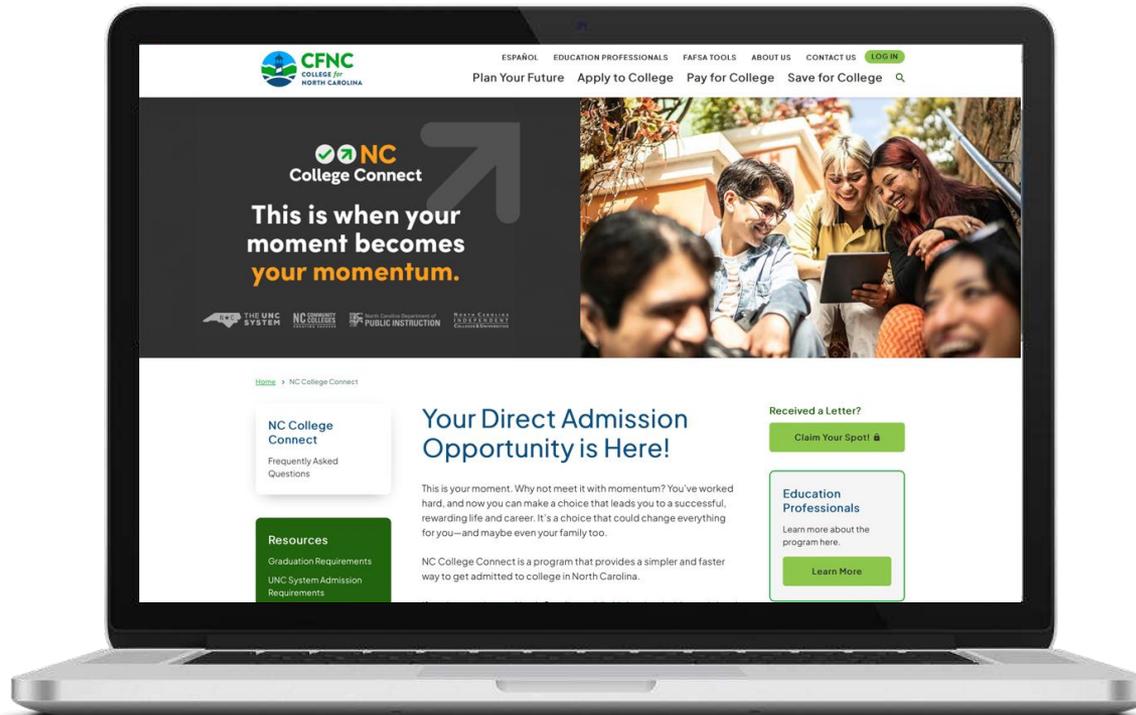
# NC College Connect Timeline



# Three Steps to Admission

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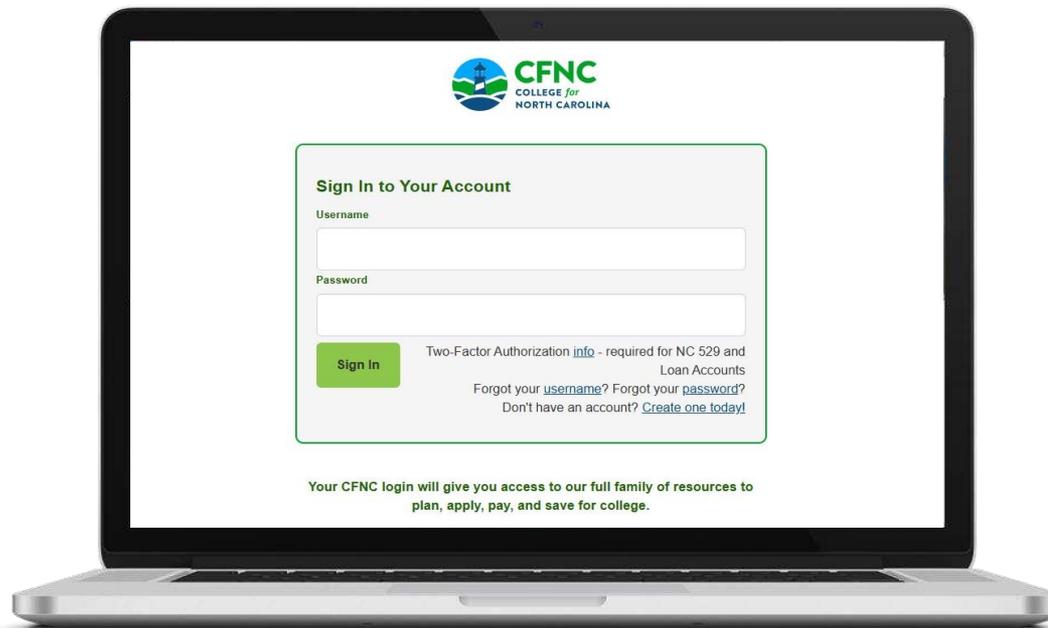
**Step 1:** Students scan the QR code on their letter to visit [NCCollegeConnect.org](https://NCCollegeConnect.org), where they access the application portal.



# Three Steps to Admission

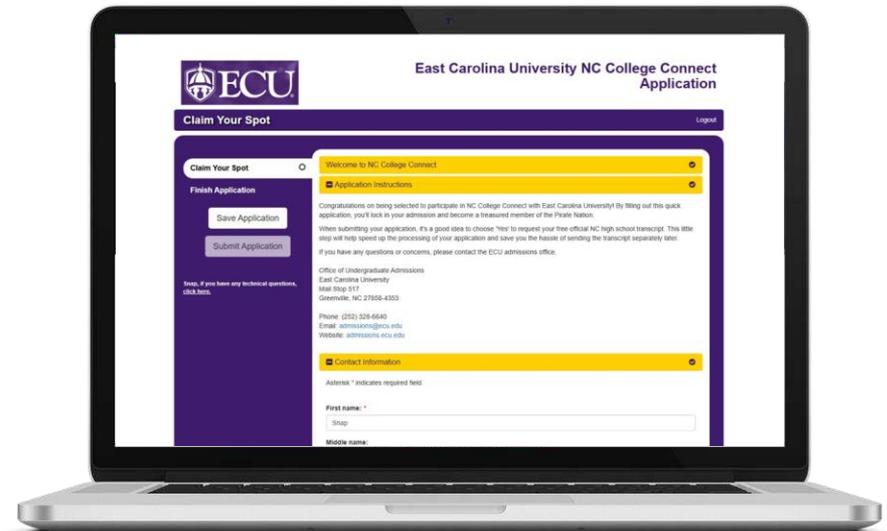
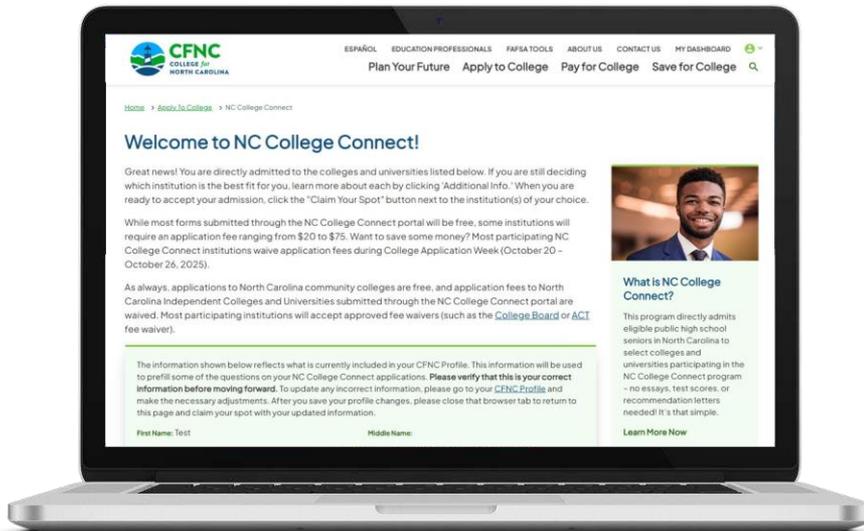
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**Step 2:** On NCCollegeConnect.org, qualifying students are directed to log into the NC College Connect portal using their existing CFNC.org account information, or they are prompted to create a new CFNC account.



# Three Steps to Admission

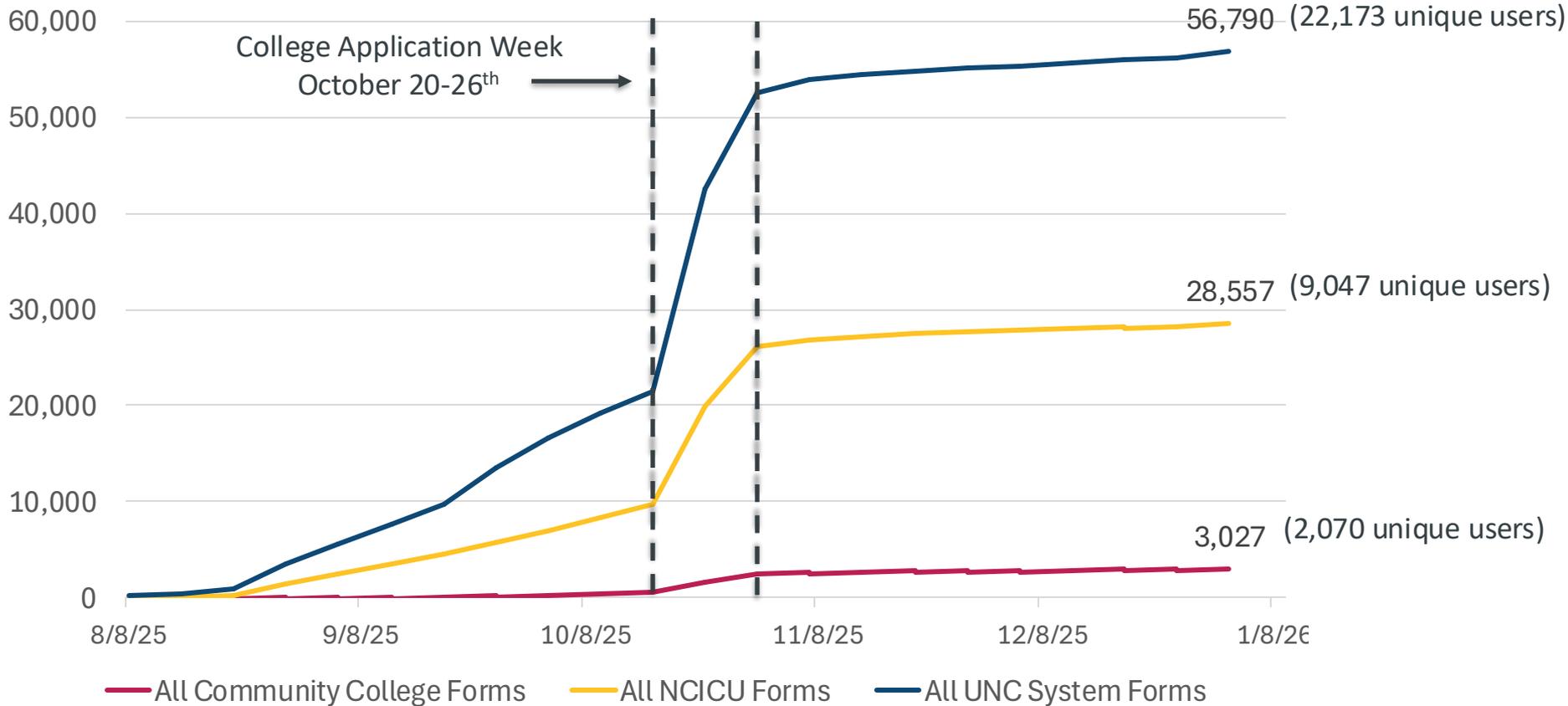
**Step 3:** After logging in, students see a complete list of institutions where they have been offered admission based on their GPA. They will have the option to complete a NC College Connect form to accept their admission for each college or university of their choice.



# NC College Connect

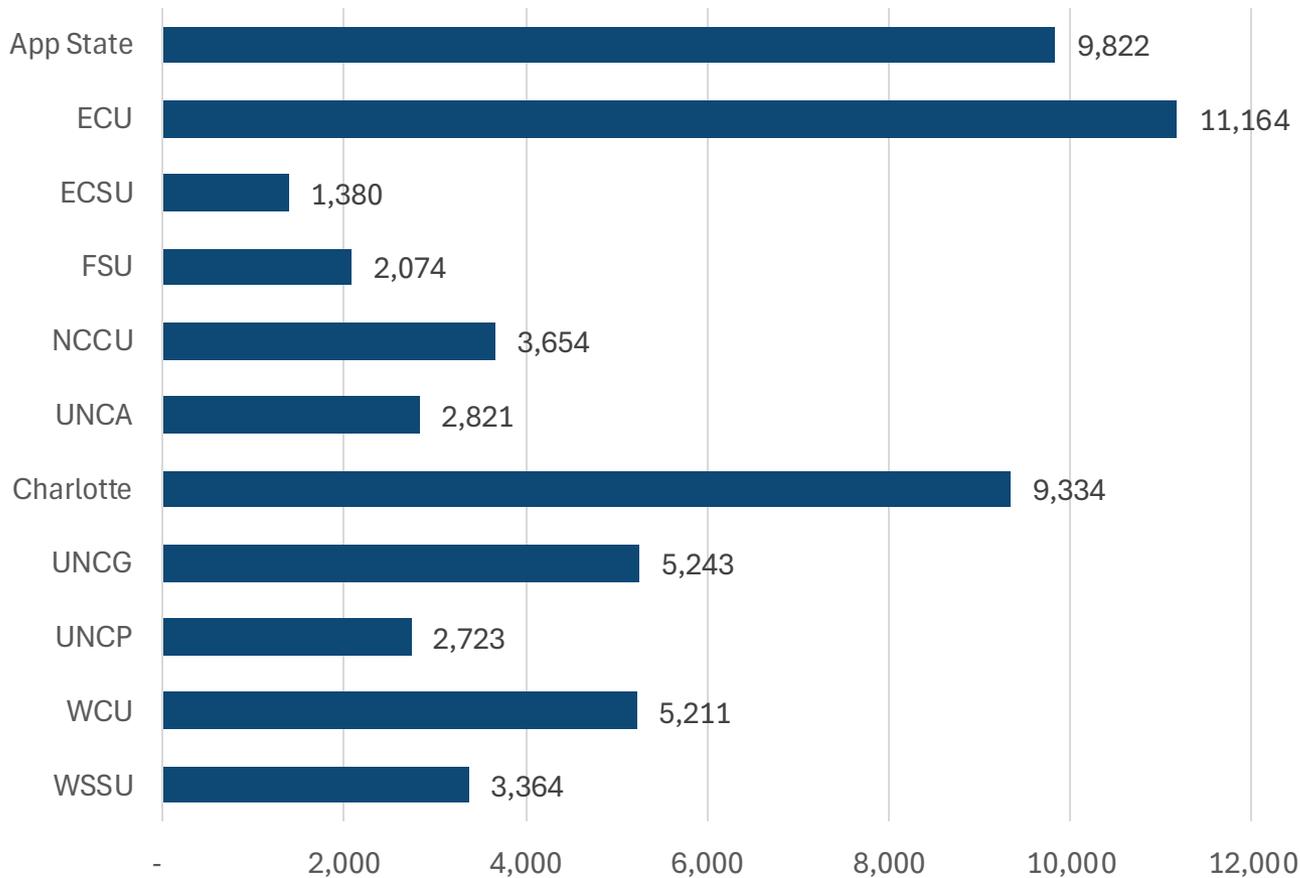
**Total Forms Submitted: 88,374**

All NC College Connect Forms by Sector



# NC College Connect

NC College Connect Fall 2026 UNC System Forms



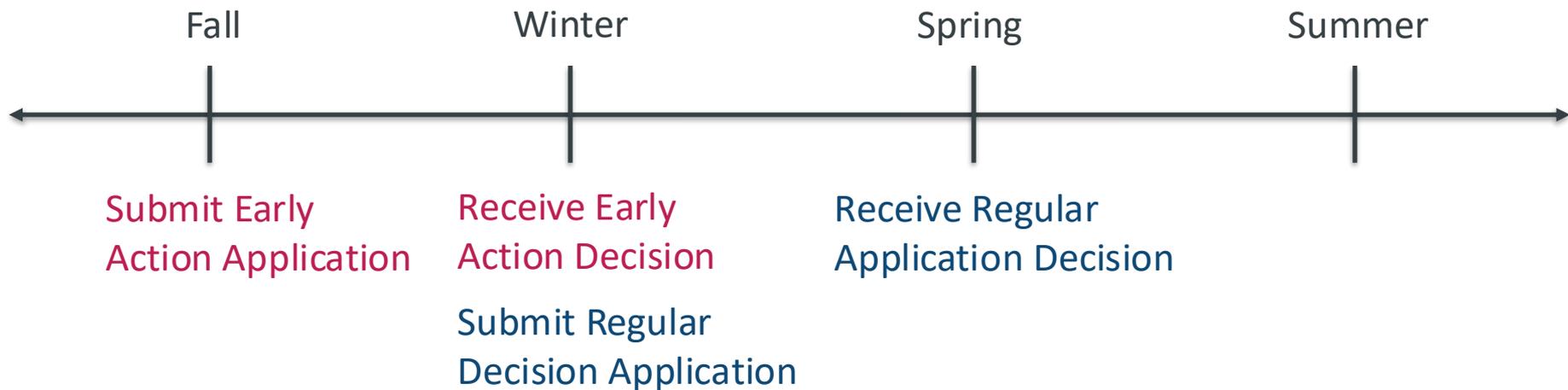
Over 1/3 of forms had a GPA of 3.6 or higher

# UNC System Admissions Timeline Overview

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**10** institutions have Early Action + Regular Decision Admissions  
(Including 5 NC College Connect Participants)

**6** institutions have Rolling Admissions

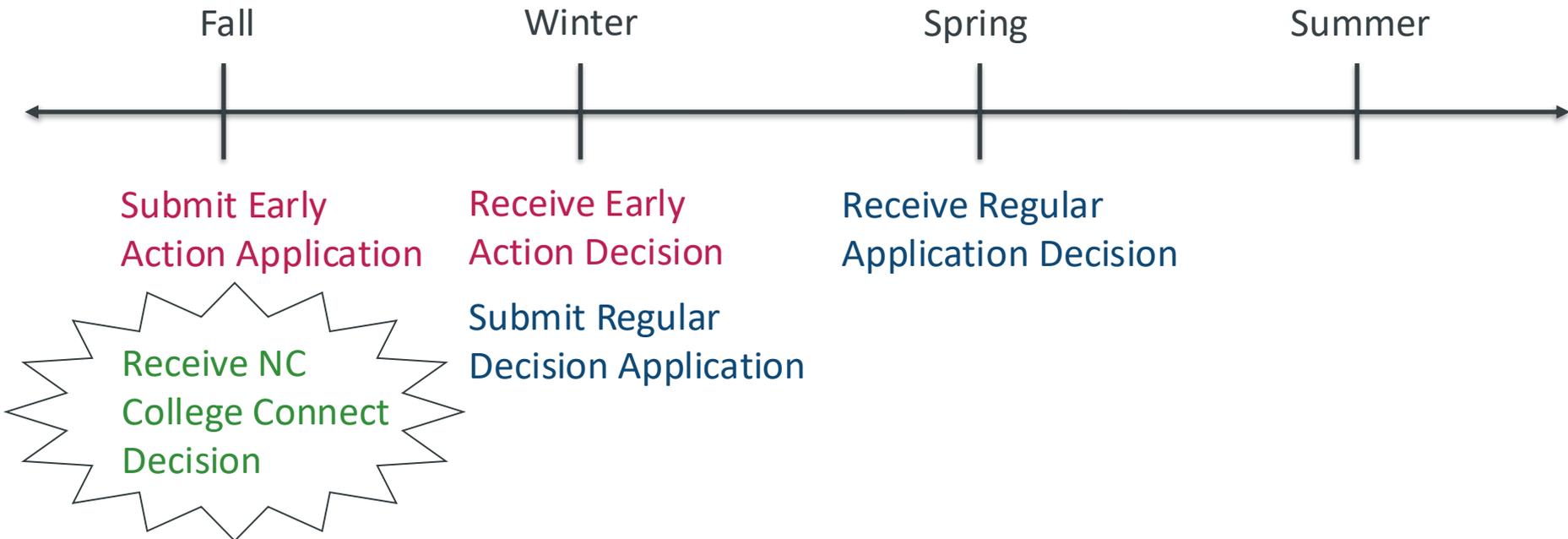


# UNC System Admissions Timeline Overview

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(Including 5 NC College Connect Participants)

**6** institutions have Rolling Admissions



# NC College Connect: Next Steps

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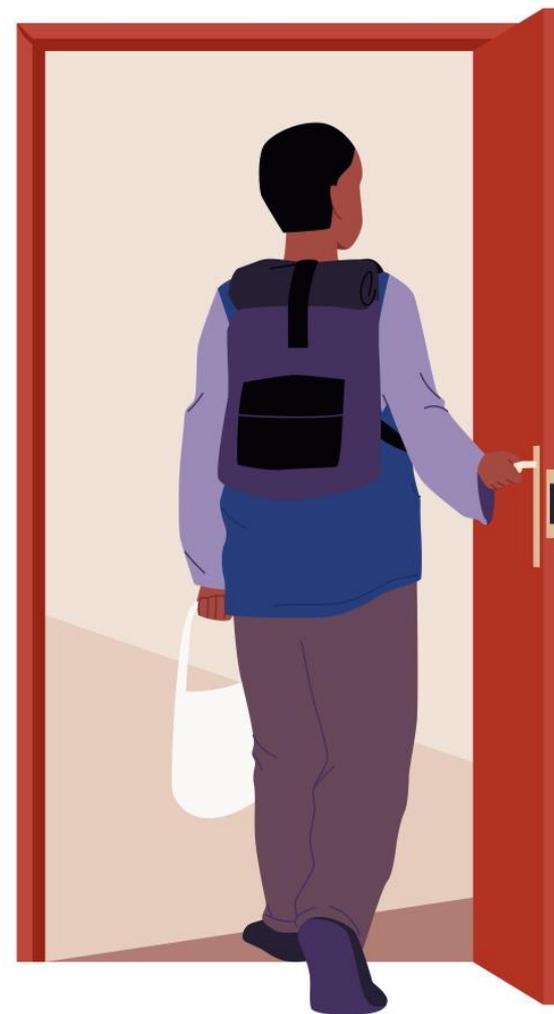
## Phase III:

- Formalizing the NC College Connect brand
- Universal NC College Connect form
- Enhanced student experience
- Every North Carolina public high school student will receive a letter of admission to their local community college



NC College Connect **brings students to the doorstep** by prompting them to consider institutions they may not have previously considered.

But institutions must still convince students to **walk through that door** and enroll.



**Thank You**

**Questions?**



# NC College Connect

Dear [NAME],

Congratulations! We are pleased to inform you that you have been offered **direct admission** to select **UNC System universities, North Carolina independent colleges and universities, and North Carolina community colleges** for the **2026–2027** academic year through the NC College Connect program.

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- Chowan University
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- Elizabeth City State University
- Fayetteville State University
- Gardner–Webb University\*
- Greensboro College
- Guilford College
- Johnson C. Smith University\*
- Lees-McRae College
- Lenoir–Rhyne University\*
- Livingstone College
- Louisburg College
- Mars Hill University\*
- Meredith College\*
- Methodist University
- Mid-Atlantic Christian University
- Montreat College
- North Carolina Central University
- North Carolina Wesleyan University
- Pfeiffer University
- Saint Augustine’s University
- Salem College\*
- Shaw University
- University of Mount Olive
- University of North Carolina at Asheville
- University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- University of North Carolina at Greensboro
- University of North Carolina at Pembroke
- Warren Wilson College
- Western Carolina University
- William Peace University
- Wingate University\*
- Winston–Salem State University
- [Community College]

**Ready to meet your moment?** Since you currently meet the NC College Connect requirements and your weighted GPA is 2.8 or higher\*\*, **you are now eligible for admission to select North Carolina colleges and universities**—without a traditional application, essay, or recommendation letter. We applaud your hard work and dedication during high school, and now we encourage you to reap the benefits.



\*These colleges and universities have additional requirements for a student to qualify for direct admission. These requirements will be noted in each institution’s NC College Connect form.

\*\*All college and university admission is conditional, based on your final high school transcript, GPA, and other graduation and NC College Connect requirements, which can be found on the FAQ page at [NCCollegeConnect.com](https://www.nccollegeconnect.com). Meeting NC College Connect requirements means meeting course requirements and any additional criteria required by individual institutions, as well as responding to safety questions to show a student meets the institutions’ safety requirements. You can access NC College Connect requirements via the QR code on the next page.

But college is not just about academics, it is about discovering who you are, building a network of mentors and lifelong friends, and launching your future. Whether you are preparing for a career or continuing your education, this is your moment to take the next step.

**Here's what to do next to secure your spot for the 2026–2027 school year:**

- 1. Scan the QR code** to visit [NCCollegeConnect.org](https://NCCollegeConnect.org) to learn more about participating institutions and NC College Connect requirements.
- 2. Log in.** After scanning, you will log in to your [CFNC.org](https://CFNC.org) account or create a new one to view the full list of colleges and universities where you have been offered admission.
- 3. Submit the NC College Connect form** to accept admission to the institutions of your choice. Submit a form for each institution at which you would like to claim your spot. There is no limit to the number of forms you submit.
  - a. Submitting a form is non-binding—it does not commit you to attend the institution.** You can change your mind at any time! Completing the form simply signals your interest, reserves your spot at the institution, and may even help you qualify for scholarships at certain institutions. This gives you the flexibility to explore your options while keeping opportunities open.

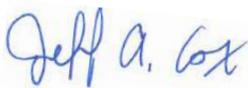
**Be sure to save the date for College Application Week (Oct. 20–26)** to avoid application fees for most participating colleges and universities.

We know that choosing a college or university is a big decision, and admission is only one part of the journey. While being admitted through NC College Connect makes the college application process easier, we understand your ability to attend requires additional consideration. The State of North Carolina offers resources to help you plan, apply, and pay for college at [CFNC.org](https://CFNC.org), including more information on financial aid.

Again, congratulations on your selection for this program, and for all your hard work along the way.



**Peter Hans**  
President, The University  
of North Carolina System



**Dr. Jeff Cox**  
President, North Carolina  
Community College System



**Dr. A. Hope Williams**  
President, North Carolina  
Independent Colleges  
and Universities



**Maurice "Mo" Green**  
North Carolina  
Superintendent of  
Public Instruction



**Learn more about the program  
and get started.**

Congratulations!

We are pleased to inform you that you have been offered direct admission to these select UNC System universities for the 2026–2027 academic year through the NC College Connect program:



Appalachian  
State University



East Carolina  
University



Elizabeth City  
State University



Fayetteville  
State University



North Carolina  
Central University



University of  
North Carolina Asheville



University of  
North Carolina Charlotte



University of  
North Carolina Greensboro



University of  
North Carolina Pembroke



Western Carolina  
University



Winston-Salem  
State University

We applaud your hard work and dedication during high school, and now we encourage you to reap the benefits. As you head into your senior year, we encourage you to keep up the great work that got you here! **You'll need to maintain your GPA as it was reported at the close of your junior year—also known as your admitted GPA for this program—and complete your courses successfully.** Participating institutions have the option to withdraw an offer or require additional information, like test scores, if final NC College Connect requirements are not met or your admitted GPA decreases. But you have already proven you are capable—now it's just about finishing strong, and you're already on the right track!

**Now, all that's left to do is claim your spot!** Submit the short NC College Connect form to accept your offer(s) from the UNC System institution of your choice. You will need to submit a form for each institution at which you'd like to claim your spot and there is no limit to the number of forms you submit.

While completing each form signals your interest, reserves your spot at the institution, and can help you qualify for scholarships at certain institutions, **submitting a form is non-binding and does not commit you to attend the institution**, so you can change your mind at any time. This gives you the flexibility to explore your options while keeping opportunities open.

And do not forget, once you have accepted admission through the NC College Connect portal for an institution, you will not need to submit a traditional application through CommonApp, CFNC.org, or the institution website.

Be sure to save the date for College Application Week (Oct. 20–26) to avoid application fees for most participating UNC System universities.

While being admitted through NC College Connect makes the college application process easier, we understand your ability to attend requires additional consideration. The State of North Carolina offers resources to help you plan, apply, and pay for college at CFNC.org, including more information on financial aid.

Again, congratulations on your selection for this program, and for all your hard work along the way.

Sincerely,



**Heather Hulburt Norris, Ph.D.**  
Chancellor  
Appalachian State University



**Philip G. Rogers, Ed.D.**  
Chancellor  
East Carolina University



**S. Keith Hargrove, Sr., Ph.D.**  
Chancellor  
Elizabeth City State University



**Darrell T. Allison, J.D.**  
Chancellor  
Fayetteville State University



**Karrie G. Dixon, Ed.D.**  
Chancellor  
North Carolina Central University



**Kimberly van Noort, Ph.D.**  
Chancellor  
University of North Carolina Asheville



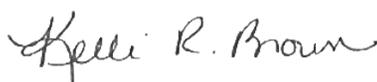
**Sharon L. Gaber, Ph.D.**  
Chancellor  
University of North Carolina Charlotte



**Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr., Ph.D.**  
Chancellor  
University of North Carolina Greensboro



**Robin Gary Cummings, M.D.**  
Chancellor  
University of North Carolina Pembroke



**Kelli R. Brown, Ed.D.**  
Chancellor  
Western Carolina University



**Bonita J. Brown, J.D.**  
Chancellor  
Winston-Salem State University

**AGENDA ITEM**

A-3. Reaching North Carolina's High-Achieving Students ..... Chancellor Karrie Dixon, NC Central University  
Chancellor Sharon Gaber, UNC Charlotte

**Situation:** Over the course of this academic year, the Committee on Strategic Initiatives will build a shared understanding of achievement culture and better define the role the System plays in countering unhealthy standards.

**Background:** Colleges across the country are competing for students. North Carolina is in a relatively competitive position in terms of projected high school graduates, but neighboring states will continue to try to recruit high-achieving North Carolina students. It is important that we continue to attract these students to attend our public universities. The System Office facilitates several statewide programs, such as NC College Connect and the Next NC Scholarship, to streamline the application process and make sure that students are aware that a quality education is available to them. However, the decision of where to attend college remains a very nuanced and personal choice, and we rely heavily on the strong, unique brand reputations that our member institutions have established. Put simply, these statewide programs can bring students to the doorstep, but it is often up to individual institutions to convince students to walk through the door.

**Assessment:** Chancellors from two of our universities will share strategies they use to recruit high-achieving students, including honors programs, small class sizes, responsive degree offerings, and other initiatives.

**Action:** This item is for information only.



**NC Central**  
UNIVERSITY

**WHERE  
PURPOSE TAKES  
FLIGHT**

# Strengthening the Academic Profile: Enrollment Strategies for Attracting and Retaining High Achievers

Chancellor Karrie G. Dixon

Jan. 28, 2026

# HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS: ENROLLMENT TRENDS AND ACADEMIC INDICATORS



**NCCentral**  
UNIVERSITY

Where Purpose Takes Flight



## In-State Enrollment Summary

<b>Fall 2023- Fall 2025</b>			
	<b>Fall 2023</b>	<b>Fall 2024</b>	<b>Fall 2025</b>
Undegraduate	4,577	5,082	5,706
Graduate	1,223	1,226	1,288
Professional	308	288	269
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6,108</b>	<b>6,596</b>	<b>7,263</b>

	<b>Fall 2023</b>	<b>Fall 2024</b>	<b>Fall 2025</b>
<b>Average ACT Scores</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>20.4</b>

**ATTRACTING, ENROLLING AND RETAINING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

# HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS: IMPACT ON THE UNIVERSITY



## Strengthens Academic Reputation and Competitiveness

- Higher Retention and Graduation Rates
- Increased Graduate and Professional School Placement
- Enhances Faculty Research and Student Outcomes
- Builds a Culture of Excellence and Aspiration
- Strong Return on Investment in Student Success

**ATTRACTING, ENROLLING AND RETAINING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

# HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS: ENROLLMENT STRATEGY CORE PILLARS



## Targeted Recruitment and Early Outreach

- Honors-focused recruitment campaigns with personalized messaging: Eagle Promise Application Portal
- Invitation-only events, e.g. Eagle Scholars Day
- Dedicated recruitment and engagement for J.D. Dobbs Clement Early College High School Students
- Early exposure to academic and student-centered campus experiences
- Personalized campus tours and departmental visits
- Open House session dedicated to Honors students

# HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS: STUDENT SUCCESS OUTCOMES



## NCCU Cheatham-White Scholars

Cohort	Retention (1 year)	Graduation Rates (4 Year)	Cumulative GPA
2018	100	82.7	3.77
2019	100	85.7	3.88
2020	100	87.5	3.72
2021	100		3.81
2022	100		3.87
2023	100		3.8

**ATTRACTING, ENROLLING AND RETAINING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

# HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS: ENROLLMENT STRATEGY CORE PILLARS



## Premier Honors Program

- Small class sizes with enriched curriculum
- Priority advising, registration and housing
- Faculty mentorship and leadership development
- Honors Student Council leadership opportunities
- Guaranteed access to research, internships and fellowships
- Funding for conference travel and scholarly presentations
- Annual recognition at the Honors Convocation
- Cohort-based learning communities and Scholars Housing
- Academic and professional student organizations

**ATTRACTING, ENROLLING AND RETAINING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

# NCCU'S COMMITMENT TO EAGLE EXCELLENCE



Strategic investment in High Achievers strengthens the **University's academic profile**, advances student success and elevates the **University's future.**



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# NCCentral

UNIVERSITY

Where Purpose Takes Flight



# UNC Board of Governors Committee on Strategic Initiatives

Presentation by  
Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber, UNC Charlotte

January 28, 2026





# ATTRACTING & RETAINING NORTH CAROLINA'S HIGHEST-ACHIEVING STUDENTS





# WHY 'THE DIFFERENCE IS CHARLOTTE' MATTERS

- Charlotte as a dynamic learning ecosystem
- City as an extension of the classroom
- Value proposition for high-achieving students



# WHO WE ARE ATTRACTING

- Enrollment: 32,207  
(3rd largest in UNC System)
- Second largest  
undergraduate population
- Fall 2025 incoming  
GPA: 3.96 weighted
- 34% first-generation  
undergraduates





# WHAT TOP STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR

- Academic rigor
- Supportive, connected environment
- Career-launching experiences



# ELITE PATHWAYS: LEVINE SCHOLARS & HONORS COLLEGE

- Levine Scholars Program
- Honors College

- Belk College  
Belk Scholars, Niblock Scholars,  
Business Honors program





# R1 RESEARCH & UNDERGRADUATE ENGAGEMENT

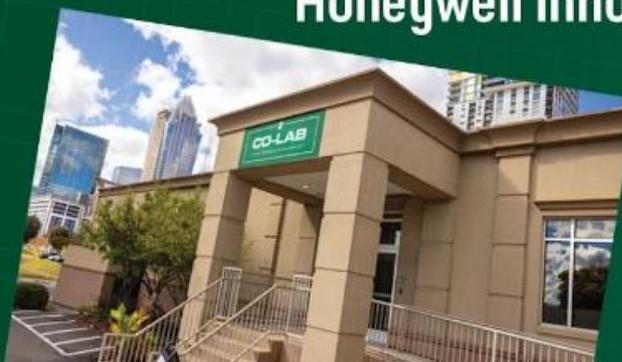
- Carnegie R1 research status
- Research Symposia and Summer Research Scholars
- Research Centers and Institutes





# INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM: LABS, CENTERS, INSTITUTES & PARTNERSHIPS

- Charlotte AI Institute
- National Defense Intelligence & Innovation Institute (NDI3)
- BATT CAVE
- CIPHER
- Mebane Early Literacy Center
- Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation/CO-LAB
- Super Fab Lab
- 30+ business partners in PORTAL
- Truist Institute for Success; Honeywell Innovation Lab



# CAREER OUTCOMES & EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

- 'Internships for All' initiative
- Experiential education
- 93% of graduates employed or in further study within 6 months





# SIGNATURE, HIGH-DEMAND ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

## DISTINCTIVE PROGRAMS

- Motorsports Engineering
- Precision Metrology
- Sports Analytics
- Data Science and AI
- Entrepreneurship

## HIGH-IMPACT WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

- Nursing
- Engineering
- Bioinformatics
- Business





# WHY THIS MATTERS FOR NORTH CAROLINA

- Retains top talent in state
- Strengthens regional workforce
- Enhances pathways from classroom to career





# THANK YOU + QUESTIONS

