



MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Committee on Strategic Initiatives

September 16, 2026

15 minutes after the adjournment of the Committee on University Governance

Via Videoconference and PBS North Carolina Livestream

UNC System Office

223 S. West Street, Board Room (17th Floor)

Raleigh, North Carolina

AGENDA

- A-1. Approval of the Open Session Minutes of May 20, 2026 Gene Davis
- A-2. Strategic Plan Update Gene Davis
- A-3. Academic Rigor and the Value of a UNC System Degree.....Shun Robertson
Toby King, Faculty Assembly Chair
Jim Pfaendtner, North Carolina State University
Neva Specht, Appalachian State University
Ontario Wooden, North Carolina Central University
- A-4. Adjourn

DRAFT MINUTES

May 20, 2026

15 minutes after the adjournment of the Committee on Audit, Risk Management, and Compliance

Via Videoconference and PBS North Carolina Livestream

UNC System Office

223 S. West Street, Suite 1800

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 or by phone: John A. Fraley, Pearl Burris-Floyd, Swadesh Chatterjee, Gene Davis, and Rushil Sachania.

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

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

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

The chair called the meeting to order at 3:40 p.m. on Wednesday, May 20, 2026. The open session minutes from the February 25, 2026, meeting were approved by unanimous consent.

2. North Carolina's Shifting Demographics (Item A-4)

Dr. Nathan Dollar, director of Carolina Demography, provided an overview of the trends impacting North Carolina's demographic composition and how those demographics could affect the UNC System.

3. Advancing a Healthy Achievement Culture Across the UNC System (Item A-2)

Dr. Shun Robertson, senior vice president for Strategy and Policy, discussed measures to foster a healthy achievement culture within the UNC System.

4. The Next Phase of *Higher Expectations* (Item A-3)

Dr. Robertson discussed the next phase of the UNC System strategic plan, *Higher Expectations*.

There being no further business and without objection, the meeting adjourned at 4:36 p.m.

Sonja Nichols, Secretary

AGENDA ITEM

A-2. Strategic Plan UpdateGene Davis

Situation: Over the next year, the Committee on Strategic Initiatives will guide the next phase of the UNC System Strategic Plan, *Higher Expectations*. The presentation will outline next steps for updating the strategic plan, with a focus on the Access theme.

Background: The UNC System originally launched *Higher Expectations* as its strategic plan to guide systemwide priorities, institutional performance, and student success outcomes in 2017. Since its adoption, the plan has driven measurable progress in key areas, including access, affordability, and student completion.

As the higher education landscape continues to evolve, including shifts in enrollment trends, workforce demands, and emerging technologies, the need has emerged to refresh and renew the strategic plan. This update is intended to sustain momentum while responding to new challenges and opportunities.

Assessment: The UNC System is well-positioned to build on the foundation established under *Higher Expectations*. Institutions have made significant strides, but the environment in which they operate has changed, requiring a forward-looking approach. The refresh of *Higher Expectations* represents an opportunity to align the System's strategy with North Carolina's evolving economic and workforce needs.

Action: This item is for information only.



**THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM**

Strategic Plan Update: Access

Committee on Strategic Initiatives

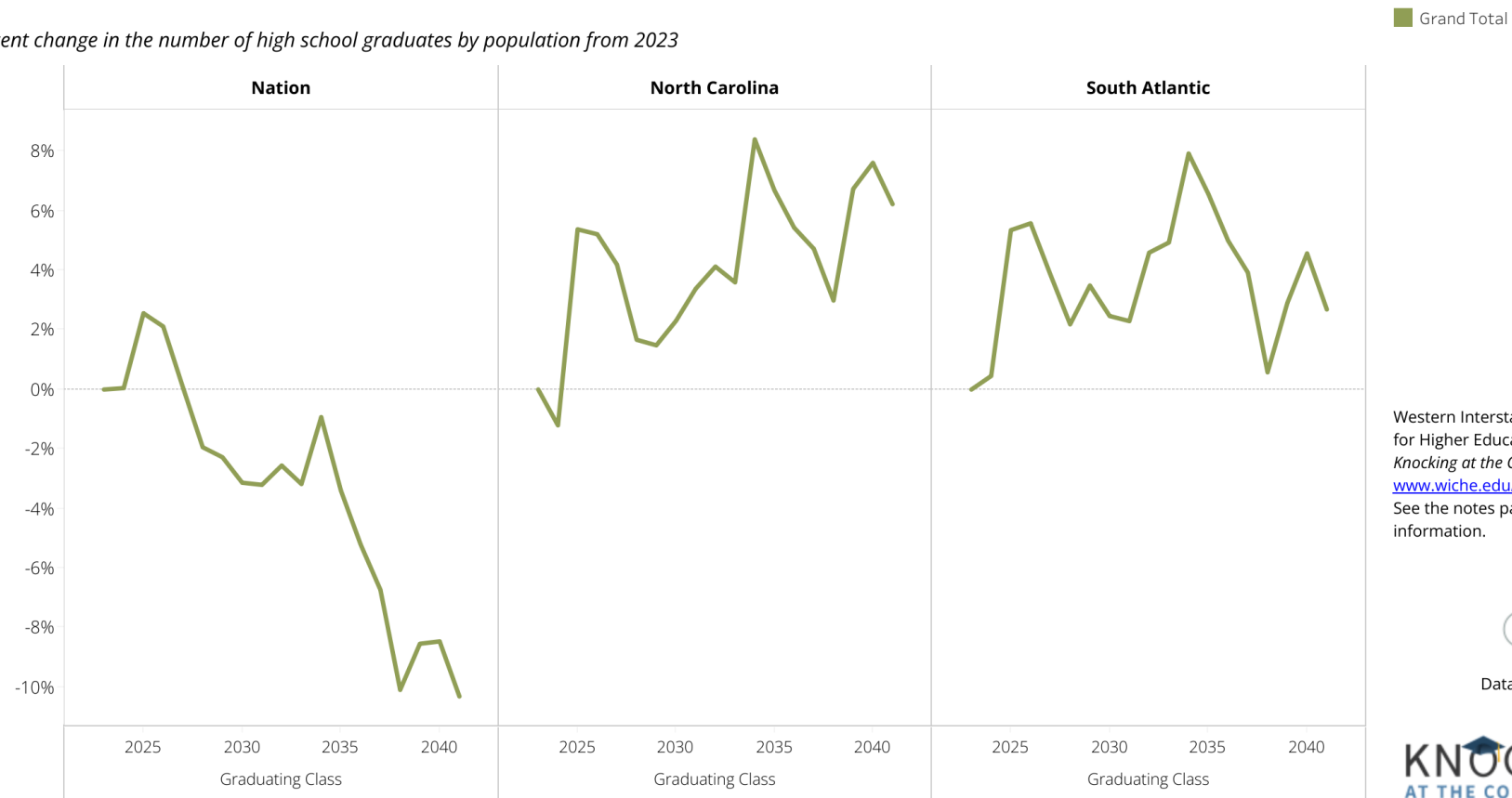
September 16, 2026

Key Takeaways from Dr. Nathan Dollar's Presentation

- By 2035, the population served by the UNC System will look meaningfully different from the population it serves today.
 - Growing population
 - Older
 - More urban
- Migration now drives nearly all of North Carolina's growth

High School Graduates Projections: 2026-2041

Percent change in the number of high school graduates by population from 2023



Western Interstate Commission
for Higher Education. (2024).
Knocking at the College Door.
www.wiche.edu/knocking
See the notes page for more
information.



Data Notes

Higher Expectations: Access

- Continued focus populations:
 - Adult learners
 - Military-affiliated students
 - Students from underserved counties
- New focus populations:
 - Re-enrollment of students who have stopped out
 - Keeping NC high school graduates in North Carolina, particularly high-achieving students
 - Transfer students

System Access Efforts

- Project Kitty Hawk
- NC College Connect
- Re-enrollment efforts
- Military Equivalency System (MES)
- Military and Veteran Support Act





**THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM**

THANK YOU

WWW.NORTHCAROLINA.EDU

AGENDA ITEM

- A-3. Academic Rigor and the Value of a UNC System Degree Shun Robertson
Toby King, Faculty Assembly Chair
Jim Pfaendtner, North Carolina State University
Neva Specht, Appalachian State University
Ontario Wooden, North Carolina Central University

Situation:	The UNC System's public value depends on confidence that its graduates have achieved the knowledge and skills represented by their degrees. As artificial intelligence rapidly changes teaching and learning, the System must ensure that academic rigor remains a priority. This discussion will provide the Committee with an overview of how academic rigor is defined by our System, how academic quality is assured at the institution level, and how faculty are adapting instruction to maintain academic integrity.
Background:	Campuses maintain academic quality through established institutional processes, including faculty governance, program review, and program and institutional accreditation. These processes help ensure that degree programs remain aligned with institutional missions and student needs.
Assessment:	In this session, the Committee will explore: (1) how the System defines academic rigor, (2) how our campuses are assessing rigor, (3) how faculty are adapting instruction to ensure academic integrity, and (4) how artificial intelligence can be a risk and an opportunity to strengthening learning.
Action:	This item is for discussion only.



**THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM**

Academic Rigor and the Value of a UNC System Degree

Committee on Strategic Initiatives

September 16, 2026

**How do we know that our graduates can
do what their degrees say they can do?**

Higher education creates economic and civic value

\$1,768 vs. \$994

Median weekly earnings

Bachelor's degree vs. high school diploma among full-time workers (2026).

2.7% vs. 4.0%

Unemployment rate

Bachelor's degree vs. high school diploma among adults (2026).

77.2% vs. 52.5%

Voting rate

Bachelor's degree or higher vs. high school graduates (2025).

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2026); U.S. Census Bureau (2025).

A UNC System degree should prepare a graduate to...

KNOW

- **Recall** essential facts and concepts.
- **Describe** ideas in their own words.
- **Interpret** meaning in context.

DO

- **Apply** knowledge in real-world situations.
- **Define** problems and **develop** new solutions.
- **Combine** knowledge and ideas to produce meaningful work.

Multiple levels of academic quality

System	Institution	Course
Board policies	Faculty governance	Course design
Data and reporting	Program review	Assignment and exams
Faculty support	Learning outcomes	Grading and feedback
	Accreditation	

The System puts academic rigor alongside academic success

400.1.5, Policy on Fostering Undergraduate Student Success

“Promote academic quality, rigor, and integrity.”

- Set academic progress and degree attainment as primary outcomes.
- Maintain policies governing satisfactory progress, course load, withdrawal, and grades.
- Review and report on retention, progression, graduation, course access, and advising.

Our credits are tied to outcomes and evidence of learning

400.1.6, Academic Calendar and Credit Requirements

“Ensure appropriate rigor and integrity in academic programs and instructional courses.”

- Credit based on intended learning outcomes verified by evidence of student achievement.
- Alignment with US Department of Education and accreditor standards.

AI creates risks and opportunities for assessing rigor

Completion can look like learning.

- AI can make traditional, unsupervised assignments harder to interpret.
- Detection alone cannot answer whether a student learned.

Can make evidence of learning stronger.

- AI requires us to redesign assessments.
- We have to ask students in different ways to explain their thinking.

Supporting Academic Rigor in the Age of AI

System-level support for institution-led teaching and learning

The System Office is helping institutions translate fast-moving AI change into faculty-ready guidance, shared expertise, and practical examples.

How we are supporting institutions

1 Sustain & accelerate faculty learning

Continue supporting the system-wide **Faculty Learning Community: Generative AI in Teaching and Learning**, with members from all UNC System institutions.

2 Build dedicated capacity

Currently recruiting a **Senior Director of AI in Teaching and Learning** to coordinate resources, workshops, and cross-institution collaboration.

3 Turn evidence into practice

Curate research and campus examples into concise, practical resources faculty can use in courses and programs.

Upcoming deliverables for faculty and academic leaders

The Senior Director of AI in Teaching and Learning will support faculty and instructional staff with evidence-based practical AI teaching and learning resources, programming, and examples from across the UNC System.

Rigorous assessment of learning in the age of AI

Applied research summary + UNC System examples of rigorous testing and assessment practices.

Assignment design in the age of AI

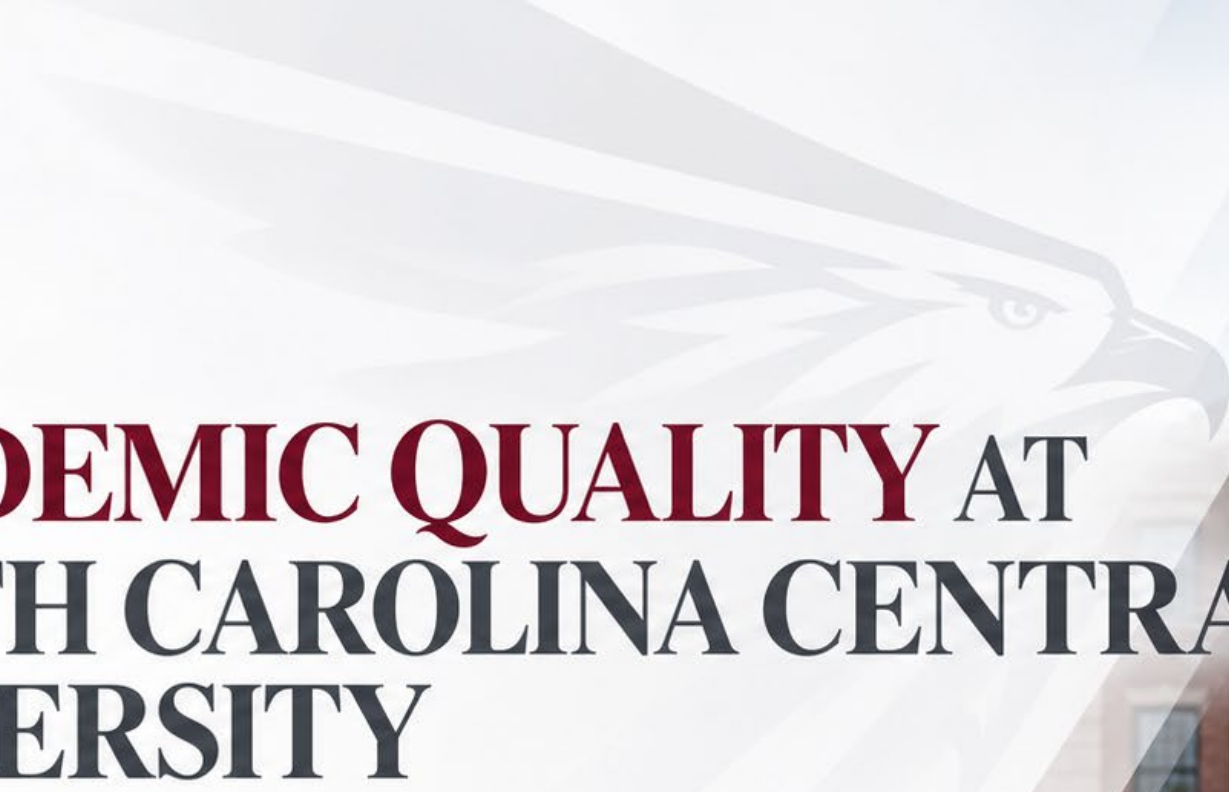
Evidence base + practical tips + assignment share featuring effective examples from UNC System faculty.



**THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM**

THANK YOU

WWW.NORTHCAROLINA.EDU



ACADEMIC QUALITY AT NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

Ontario S. Wooden, Ph.D.

Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

SEPTEMBER 16, 2026



JAMES EDWARD
SHEPARD
1875 — 1947
FOUNDER & PRESIDENT
NORTH CAROLINA COLLEGE
AT DURHAM
1910 — 1947



NCCU Academic Quality Guarantee

Rigor is designed, demonstrated, reviewed, and improved—not assumed.

Every NCCU degree represents verified learning, relevant capability, and high academic standards.

1 DEFINE

Faculty establish program learning outcomes, curriculum expectations, and discipline-specific standards. This is required in the RTE Process especially in Program Requirements/Curriculum and Faculty Sufficiency

2 DEMONSTRATE

Students produce direct evidence of learning through authentic assignments, performances, examinations, practica, and culminating work. Multiple modes of assessment allow for a better understanding of actual student learning!

3 VERIFY + IMPROVE

Results are reviewed through faculty/administrative governance (i.e. UUCC, Graduate Council, APC) assessment, accreditation, and the five-year academic program review.

Academic Quality & Rigor Are Built Into the Learning Experience

03

Degrees are not simply awarded for course completion— they are earned by demonstrated mastery.

1

Academic Programs Built with Clear Expectations for Learning

Learning outcomes align curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

2

Students are Taught by Qualified Faculty

Faculty credentials are documented and justified for the courses and programs they teach.

3

Engagement Challenges the Student

Upper-level work requires analysis, application, synthesis, communication, and disciplinary judgment.

4

Authentic Demonstration of Skills to be Workforce Relevant

Students apply knowledge in research, labs, clinical/practicum settings, field experiences, internships, performances, and capstones.

Expectations
Academic Quality
Evidence **Rigor** Evaluation
Learning Experience
Improvement

How We Know Our Graduates Can Do What We Say They Can Do

04

NCCU uses multiple, converging forms of evidence—inside the curriculum and beyond it.

DIRECT EVIDENCE

Rubric-scored signature assignments • capstones • exams • portfolios • performances • research

APPLIED EVIDENCE

Clinical/practicum evaluations • internships • field experiences • simulations • licensure preparation

PROGRESSION EVIDENCE

Course success • persistence • graduation • time to degree • program completion patterns

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

External reviewers in program review process • specialized/regional accreditation • licensure/certification outcomes • employer/partner feedback

The question we ask is simple:

What EVIDENCE demonstrates that students achieved the learning we promised?

Academic Program Review: A Five-Year Quality Check

Every undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree program undergoes systematic review.

5
YEAR
CYCLE

Student demand

current + projected

Workforce demand

current + projected

Student outcomes

retention, graduation,
employment

Quality of learning

curriculum + learning
outcomes

Resources + productivity

faculty, cost, SCH

State contribution

health, attainment,
quality of life

Self-study → External reviewers → Site visit → Faculty/Dean response → Provost action

A Layered Academic Quality System

No single measure carries the burden. NCCU triangulates quality across multiple levels.

INSTITUTIONAL

SACSCOC accreditation • institutional effectiveness

PROGRAM

Five-year academic program review • specialized accreditation where applicable • external peer review

FACULTY

Credential verification • faculty evaluation • shared governance • teaching effectiveness

STUDENT LEARNING

Program outcomes • course-level evidence • authentic assessments • applied learning

A degree that is defensible, transparent, and continuously improved. One that prepares graduates to be successful in the workforce!

AI and Academic Quality at NCCU

ADVISORY

- Institute for Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Research (IAIER)
 - Ethical AI and Legal Technology
 - AI and Cybersecurity
 - AI in Biomanufacturing and Health Sciences
- NCCU AI Working Group
 - Professional Development
 - Policy Formation
 - Research

ACTIVITY

- AI Emerging Scholars and Leaders
 - Leadership, mentoring, and professional development
 - Digital badging for faculty and staff



- IBM SkillsBuild Online Platform
 - First -Year Seminar (UNIV 1100)
 - Required assignments on AI use

SEED GRANT PROGRAM

- Targeted funding for faculty, postdoctoral researchers, and students
- Faculty Research Award Program
- Program Objectives:
 - Foster innovative AI research
 - Promote interdisciplinary collaboration
 - Expand participation in AI research
 - Encourage external funding

NCCU advantage: IAIER + industry partnerships + AI literacy can connect academic quality directly to the technological workforce.