

UNC System President Peter Hans
Remarks to the UNC Board of Governors
July 23, 2026

I'd like to offer a brief update on the work at UNC Asheville. As you know, it is a unique and vital part of our higher education landscape. Having an institution rooted in the arts and sciences, focused on undergraduate teaching and delivering a great student experience in a supportive environment, helps us serve a fast-growing, fast-changing region of the state.

UNCA keeps us firmly tied to the great humanistic core of higher education, the venerable tradition of close inquiry and formative classroom experiences that are at the heart of our teaching mission. I am more convinced than ever that a deep Asheville-style education is gaining in actual value given shorter attention spans and increased reliance on the latest technology. These times call for judgment, character, creativity, ethical reasoning, and communication skills – in other words, what it means to be human in a world of machines.

The last few years have been tough on Asheville. Enrollment there and everywhere in the liberal arts has declined. Hurricane Helene interrupted a UNCA comeback, and we are still working through the aftermath. As you all remember, the entire Asheville region spent the fall and winter of 2024, and well into the spring and summer of 2025, in crisis and recovery mode.

Coverage of the region took a toll on recruitment, and the long-range shift in enrollment required some adaptation in UNC Asheville's programs. Chancellor van Noort and her team have done difficult and often thankless work to get the institution on sound footing for the years ahead, and I'm very grateful. Due to their persistence, UNCA is now building for the future.

The chancellor and her team are exploring high-demand majors in data science, climate science, and biochemistry; a business school to meet rising student interest; online degrees to serve adult learners; and new programs in the health sciences to address crucial needs specific to the region. Before these proposals come to the Board of Governors, we are working to reallocate funds from the System Office to support the development of these initiatives. This will be on top of \$1.5 million the System Office recently invested in campus beautification, signage, and enrollment support.

And this week a UNCA committee shared a clarified vision for a millennial campus that could deepen connections to a fast-growing city and region while serving students, faculty, and staff. They will take time to bear fruit and that's alright. One of our great strengths as a public system is that we work on long horizons, thinking about the students and citizens we'll be serving decades from now.

I see that kind of long-range ambition at Asheville. I fully expect we will see a renewed commitment to the core principles of a rich and relational education that Asheville is known for. Like the state we serve, our universities have always been a dynamic mix of tradition and innovation, devoted to preserving what is great while embracing what is new and needed. That spirit is at work at UNC Asheville, and I'm eager to see where it leads.