

**Board of Governors Meeting**  
**November 19, 2020**  
**President's Report**

Thank you all for being with us this week. We had a very full agenda, so apologies that I won't even get through all the highlights.

Any policy that makes life easier for our students certainly counts as a highlight, so please join me in celebrating our long-awaited progress on common course numbering. It seems like such a straightforward thing, establishing shared course numbers that make it much easier for students to see their transfer options. But given the huge diversity in our own campuses, the even larger number of institutions within the community college system, and the breadth and variety of course offerings all across the state, it will take a whole lot of complex work to make this happen.

We know complexity is the enemy of access. Every time we make the bureaucracy harder for students, we make it less likely they'll find the opportunities they need. Our job is to make the administrative burdens of college easier so students can focus on their academic work.

Right now, a student trying to figure out if English 101 at Caldwell Community College will count for credit at App State has to sort through a fairly dense set of PDF charts to figure it out. If they're thinking about a transfer to NC State or North Carolina A&T, things get even more complicated. That becomes a real barrier when you're talking about students with full lives, lots of responsibilities, and maybe some lingering doubts about whether a four-year degree is really meant for them.

Common course numbering makes it easy to see where your classes fit at every institution across the System. It is a perfect example of the pragmatic, under-the-hood changes that make life a whole lot easier for the people we serve. You'll see a lot more of these projects that help align our own institutions and the community colleges more closely, so that students have more paths available to higher education.

A few months ago, the Strategic Initiatives Committee held a session to hear new research about the stress and mental health concerns among students. We heard troubling data about the rise of depression and isolation during this difficult semester for students across the country, on top of the already distressing trends for young people over the past decade.

Now we have relatively high unemployment, a painful racial reckoning, and a holiday season that is joyful for most, but can be sorrowful for some. In response to that urgent need, we've taken quick action to help our students. With advice and guidance from many of our chancellors and student affairs professionals, our office has reached an agreement for Systemwide mental health support. Nine of our campuses already work with a company called ProtoCall, which offers 24/7 telehealth crisis counseling,

support, and mental health consultations. All of our students across the state are facing many of the same pressures, and I'm glad they'll all be able to benefit from this additional help.

It's a great example of how the System can help expand promising ideas from some of our campuses to all of them, leveraging the resources of the statewide University for the benefit of all.

And I want every student to know: you don't have to cope alone. We all deserve grace and care, we all struggle. Seeking help is a sign of strength. And, together, we will build resilience in this time of adversity.

I want to commend the student affairs and mental health professionals who are doing hard and honorable work at a very difficult time. This is a moment for patience and compassion. We owe that to one another in the best of times; we absolutely all need it now.

I ask your patience, too, as we plan for a spring semester that will once again test our discipline and flexibility. We've learned a lot this fall from the very different approaches taken across the System, and we'll be applying all of those lessons to the upcoming semester.

As with the fall semester, you'll see a mix of online, in-person, and hybrid learning, depending on local circumstances and the needs and capacities of each campus. No two institutions will look exactly alike in how they continue to deliver a world-class education, and that's by design. Our role here at the System level is to provide resources, guidance, and coordination, and that's what we'll continue to do as chancellors develop and implement their spring plans.

We'll be sending a detailed summary of spring semester plans to the Board after today's meeting. And I'd like to compliment my Chief of Staff Norma Houston, who has done a remarkable job as the point person in this effort, working with the campuses. She's available with any questions you may have about this plan. The plans are still being refined as we are still almost two months away from the beginning of spring semester, so they're subject to change depending on circumstances and evolving public health guidance.

- But we know the start of the semester will be delayed by around two weeks. That's more time to weather a difficult stretch with improved treatments and safe vaccines, some of which are being researched at our own institutions.
- There will be "Wellness Days" spread strategically throughout the semester in lieu of spring break to avoid the travelling back and forth.
- There will be reduced residence hall occupancy, particularly at those large campuses that may have single-occupancy only in on-campus residence halls.
- There will be increased on-campus bed space for isolation and quarantine, with back-up surge capacity.

- There will be expanded and on-going surveillance testing and improved symptomatic testing in student health centers.
- And there will be re-entry testing, either prior to or upon arrival at move-in.

I want to thank our chancellors, faculty, staff, and students for their commitment and hard work in navigating through the pandemic this semester, and for their thoughtful and careful planning for the coming spring.

Just last week, we worked closely with DHHS to get an additional 43,000 rapid COVID tests for students as they prepare to leave at the end of the semester, which is occurring this week and next. We've benefited from this kind of close cooperation since the earliest days of the pandemic, and those working relationships with the federal government, the state government, and local health departments remain strong.

You've heard me say this before — there are no perfect solutions to the dilemmas we face. People's lives aren't on indefinite hold, which means we have to keep offering the education and research our students need. We have to do it in a way that balances public health with the very real long-term consequences of cutting off avenues of opportunity for a whole generation of students.

Every one of us is facing versions of that dilemma in our work and our lives, and I hope and I pray that we're all making the best choices we can under circumstances none of us wanted.

We will overcome this season of hardship.

That sentiment goes out to our lawmakers, as well, because they will be facing one of the most difficult budget years on record. I appreciate the Budget and Finance Committee and this Board's endorsement of a sensible, streamlined set of budget and policy priorities. This University will do its part to see the state of North Carolina through a challenging moment, as we have always done before.

Finally, I want to thank the Governance Committee for bringing us a very substantive conversation about free expression on campus yesterday, and all of the thoughtful work being done to help students find their voices and listen well to the views of others. I know all of us who've spent some time in the public eye will appreciate the challenges of encouraging open-minded debate and thoughtful discussion when we have a political culture and a social media culture that seems to prize volume over substance.

It was a great reminder that, while we prepare students for careers, we also get them ready to be citizens, and hopefully teach them what it means to live in the world's first pluralistic, continent-sized democratic republic. The people who founded this University knew that democracy would have to be renewed with every generation. And that work endures.

Thank you again, and here's wishing you all a restful, gracious, and safe Thanksgiving.