



## A Message from the **PRESIDENT**

**Dear Friends,**

As we move between 24-hour news cycles and navigate our busy days, it's important to step back and look at the trends and progress happening across higher education and what's happening here at the [University of North Carolina](#) System.

That's what I'll be doing with a new monthly newsletter. I hope you'll find it helpful, and I encourage you to share it with others who may be interested as well. Read on for more.

### **Bridging a Divided State: NC's Statewide Postsecondary Attainment Goal**

It's no secret that North Carolina has deep divides. Last spring's article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* detailed the "[Two Carolinas](#)": one a place of dynamic growth, the other mired in low economic mobility and fading industries. To tackle that divide, our state's colleges and universities must deliver the transformative education we always have, but do so for many more people, and from more varied backgrounds, than ever before.

In pursuit of that goal, state leaders have launched [My Future NC](#), a Commission charged with creating a statewide postsecondary attainment goal and developing concrete recommendations for addressing the gaps and obstacles that affect a student's journey from Pre-K to college graduation.

A statewide postsecondary attainment goal will be a crucial step forward for our state. Other states are ahead of us, and we must follow their lead while taking a distinctively North Carolinian—and inclusive—approach.

The Commission's members are drawn from every corner of the state and across the political spectrum; in sectors ranging from philanthropy, education, civic life, faith-based communities, business, and government. I'm grateful to my fellow co-chairs, our outstanding steering committee and the broad set of commissioners for helping drive this effort forward.

We need everyone involved. Read more about [other state's attainment goals](#), [watch my opening remarks from the launch](#), or view the fantastic presentations from [Dr. Jim Johnson](#) and [Dr. Mike Walden](#) on our state's economic and demographic future. My Future NC's Executive Director [Kristy Tesky](#) is available for further info.

### **Breaking the Code on Economic Mobility**

The divides in North Carolina aren't unique to this state. While cities like Raleigh and Charlotte are marked by the [lowest economic mobility rates](#) in the nation, that same low mobility is present [throughout the South](#) and elsewhere in the country.

Our understanding of the forces that shape economic mobility, and crucially how colleges are able to change students' economic prospects, has been transformed by groundbreaking research from Dr. Raj Chetty and his team at the [Equality of Opportunity Project](#). Last month, the UNC System was proud to join 16 other founding partners to form the nationwide CLIMB initiative. Formed around Dr. Chetty's research team, [the CLIMB initiative](#) will combine institutions' data with information from tax records about where students came from and where they end up.

The results will provide new insights we have never had before, allowing institutions to track how programs affect student outcomes both in college and after graduation.

This work has already changed the conversation around economic mobility at colleges and universities—just read [David Leonhardt's work](#) at the *New York Times* or the recent [Politico Magazine piece on college access](#). The next wave of institution and program-level data will transform not only how we think about mobility but also what we know about the interventions that change student's trajectories.

### **The State of Play on Financial Aid**

One of those interventions that we will learn more about are our financial aid programs. The data we have now, however, show that these programs not only have a profound impact on student access but also on student success.

As the UNC Board of Governors met this month, they began with a robust policy discussion on financial aid. I encourage you to [watch the full session](#), especially the informative presentations by UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Carol Folt and UNC Charlotte Chancellor Phil Dubois.

Financial aid is a powerful tool but the current landscape is more convoluted and complicated than it should be. There are significant issues of timing, information gaps, complexity, duplicity in programs, lack of flexibility, and poorly aligned incentives. Many of these problems can be fixed at the state level or by the UNC Board of Governors. I'll be working with our Chancellors over the coming weeks to develop recommendations to bring back to the UNC Board of Governors on how we can improve our financial aid system.

## **Making the Strategic Plan a Reality**

All of these goals—erasing educational disparities in our state, boosting economic mobility, student access, and student success—form the core of [UNC’s Strategic Plan, Higher Expectations](#), unanimously adopted this year by the UNC Board of Governors.

Last month, we took a significant step forward as each of our institutions signed performance agreements that create targets and goals across nine measures for each campus.

Over the next few months, you’ll be seeing more discussion about these agreements as well as publicly accessible, interactive online dashboards to monitor System and institution-level progress. These agreements are an opportunity to measure the great work our institutions are doing while continually evaluating and holding ourselves accountable for the big goals that we know we must meet.

The 16 unique agreements, developed iteratively between campus and UNC System leadership, [can be found here](#).

## **Serving Our Veterans**

Finally, over the Veterans Day weekend, the UNC System hosted its first [Veterans Summit](#), a full-day event with voices from every level of the System and State. The UNC System is serving our military-affiliated students well in many ways, but we must scale up and enroll many more of these students if we are to serve our state’s sizable military population.

[Watch my opening remarks](#) kicking off the day or [watch our student veteran panel](#) from the morning. We’re grateful to Secretary of Military and Veteran’s Affairs [Larry Hall for speaking](#), as well as Senator David Curtis and Representatives John Bell, Holly Grange and John Szoka for [discussing the Legislature’s vision and role](#) in supporting our military population.

As always, I welcome your comments. Reach me at [president@northcarolina.edu](mailto:president@northcarolina.edu).

Sincerely,



Margaret Spellings  
President  
University of North Carolina System



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