



NORTH CAROLINA'S PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

February 22, 2013

President Thomas W. Ross
The University of North Carolina
910 Raleigh Road
P.O. Box 2688
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Dear President Ross:

As the Faculty Senate Executive Committee of the University of North Carolina at Asheville, we wish to communicate several concerns regarding the UNC system strategic plan, *Our Time, Our Future: The UNC Compact With North Carolina*, that was approved Feb. 8, 2013 by the UNC Board of Governors. We have read the responses of the UNC Faculty Assembly and the Association of Student Governments to the penultimate draft of this plan. We share the detailed, point-by-point concerns expressed in those documents regarding the effect of this strategic plan on all the UNC system campuses. However, we wish to submit to you three broader points that we believe have specific importance to UNC-Asheville's identity, its sustained quality, its reputation at regional and national levels, and its ability to maintain its mission in delivering a liberal arts curriculum.

1. *Preservation of the liberal arts mission of UNC-Asheville.* We take great pride in serving as faculty of the public liberal arts university of the State of North Carolina. However, the tone of the strategic plan, coupled with recent public statements by our Governor, suggests declining interest, understanding, and respect for the liberal arts model at the level of our state's leadership. We seek your help in preserving and strengthening this academic model at UNC-Asheville, and in demonstrating our excellence and importance as a small, special mission institution. Our quality is evidenced by our excellent Collegiate Learning Assessment outcomes and our consistent high rankings for quality and value in The Princeton Review, Fiske, and Kiplinger's. The liberal arts model is one of historic success in educating leaders, innovators, and creators of entirely new job sectors. We seek an understanding by our state's leaders that the value of a liberal arts education often is not quantifiable by short-term metrics such as graduate salaries, or placement of students into an existing job sector.

2. *Potential harm of a standardized core curriculum to the educational mission of UNC-Asheville.* In the strategic plan, the proposed action step of unifying the core competencies across the 16 degree-granting UNC institutions is troubling to our faculty. We have spent decades developing our model of undergraduate instruction, particularly in foundational courses that precede the declaration of a major. Our curriculum is

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tailored to the classical tenets of the liberal arts, and we believe it will not be possible to align our mission with a curriculum designed to serve the system as a whole. Indeed, our recent SACS-approved quality enhancement plan embraces the liberal arts model. As implementation of the strategic plan begins, we seek exceptions to the core curriculum that will allow us to require all UNC-Asheville students, including transfer students, to satisfy course requirements specific to our liberal arts model. Further, we seek protection of our funding and resources needed to continue delivering such courses at a high level of quality.

3. *Maintenance of our promise to the prospective college students of North Carolina.* The UNC Compact with North Carolina pledges to "...be true to our core mission of teaching and offer multiple pathways for student learning." UNC-Asheville's proven ability to attract freshmen with nearly the highest standardized test scores in the UNC system is a clear indication that our brand of teaching and learning is valued and desired by prospective college students. Furthermore, we are unique among the colleges and universities of our state in providing a liberal arts education at a relatively low cost, and we feel it is critical that students of all socioeconomic backgrounds have this as an option in their educational pursuits. We ask that implementation of the UNC system strategic plan at UNC-Asheville be conducted in a manner that allows us to keep our promise of delivering a unique, high-quality, affordable liberal arts option for the students of our state.

In summary, we feel our students benefit from university requirements that reflect our unique mission as a public institution of the liberal arts and sciences. Therefore, we request the leeway to mold our requirements to match what our students sought and expected when they chose UNC-Asheville. We thank you for your time and consideration, and wish to express our deep gratitude for your thoughtful leadership of the UNC system.

Respectfully submitted, with full approval of the UNC-Asheville Faculty Senate,

The Faculty Senate Executive Committee of UNC-Asheville:

Melissa Burchard, Chair

Sophie Mills

Rob Bowen

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