February 26, 2013

Melissa Burchard, Chair
Faculty Senate Executive Committee of UNC-Asheville
Sophie Mills
Rob Bowen
Ted Meigs

Dear Members of the UNCA Faculty Senate Executive Committee:

Thank you for your interest in, and careful attention to, our newly adopted strategic plan entitled “Our Time, Our Future: The UNC Compact with North Carolina.” UNC Asheville plays a unique and important role in public higher education in the state and I am pleased that each of you takes such great pride in the institution. I was fortunate to attend a liberal arts college as a student and I personally understand the value a liberal arts education. I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm my personal support for the role of UNCA as our public liberal arts university and to pledge my continuing advocacy for its importance and for the liberal arts generally in preparing the citizens, professionals, entrepreneurs and leaders North Carolina needs now and will continue to need in the future.

While I recognize your concerns about the dangers of a standardized core curriculum, I ask that you read again the sections of the strategic plan that speak directly to this matter. The plan suggests, and I fully agree, that it is appropriate for UNC to identify those crucial learning outcomes that should characterize any four-year college degree recipient, no matter where he or she earns that degree. The plan also asks us to develop a measurement strategy for documenting how well we, as a system, are helping students to master these core competencies we develop together. However, the plan also explicitly recognizes that faculty, departments, and institutions construct and deliver courses and curricula consistent with their own unique mission to students who learn in a variety of ways. While the tasks facing us will not be easy to accomplish, in no way does the plan envision or intend a standardized curriculum.
If I were to summarize the most common concern I hear from legislators and other key stakeholders, it would distill to this: How will the Board of Governors and University leaders ensure that the citizens of North Carolina have access to high quality, diverse, educational programs that are not unduly duplicative? In this respect, UNC-Asheville occupies a unique and enviable niche as being the only member of the system with a distinct, public liberal arts mission. At the risk of repeating a point made earlier, I pledge to continue making the case for the profound importance of the liberal arts to our economy and our future and advocating for UNC-Asheville’s central position in delivering that education.

Again, thank you for your many contributions to our students and to North Carolina.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Thomas W. Ross