



Dr. William L. Roper
President's Board Remarks
November 15, 2019

Good morning, everyone.

Coming to Elizabeth City is a powerful reminder of the value in a change of scenery. Being here has given the members of the Board and all of us a valuable opportunity to see first-hand the impact of what we do.

I assume everyone here today is profoundly moved by this institution's storied history *and* the spectacular turnaround it is experiencing under the leadership of Chancellor Dixon and her top-notch team. There's still work to be done. But, the renewed vitality on campus is unmistakable. The great teaching, research, and talent coming out of this institution make it clear that, truly, ECSU is rising.

Thank you to everyone here who has welcomed us into the campus community. We all understand how much work goes into making an event look effortless. Your dedication has helped to make this Board meeting a productive one.

I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of everyone on this Board, especially Chair Ramsey, Vice Chair Murphy, and Secretary Pearl Burris-Floyd.

Last week, on November 6th, Chair Ramsey, Vice Chair Murphy, and I met with the senior leadership team at the System Office. For several concentrated hours, we sat *together*, and we talked about up-coming priorities. Without distraction, we dedicated our dialogue to the University's core mission—"to discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society."

Taking this time to focus on how we serve our students and all North Carolinians was truly refreshing. We have a lot on the agenda right now and in the coming months.

We will soon be in the midst of re-evaluating how we have identified our universities' peer institutions across the nation. This is intensive work, but it is all-important. Studying the outcomes at our peer institutes is how we gauge our own performance in terms of research productivity, graduation rates, faculty salaries, and so on.

We are also collaborating with each of our institutions to clarify their missions. This is a critical step toward making sure that each institution is serving its region and its students, and that program offerings and research priorities align with these institutional missions.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize two of our institutions who were honored recently at the Association of Public and Land-Grant University's annual meeting. North Carolina State was given the 2019 Innovation & Economic Prosperity award, while UNC Charlotte received the award for best overall improvement in graduation/completion rates. These highly-coveted awards recognize innovative projects or programs in economic engagement. There were only three awards that were distributed in total, so for the UNC System to receive two of them is pretty remarkable. Congratulations to Chancellors Woodson and Dubois, and their institutions, for these unique honors.

Much of the work ahead of us is critical to the UNC System's push to maintain its competitive advantage in the national higher education landscape.

For example, we are exploring strategies to address demographic trends that are weakening enrollment in universities in other regions and which could potentially impact our institutions in the future. Nationally, the growth rate of the 18 to 24-year-old population is slowing. Our 2019 enrollment was the largest ever. But between 2028 and 2038, the growth rate of the 18 to 24-year-old population will slow dramatically. If we don't take action, our enrollments could start to shrink. So, we are studying ways to address this formidable challenge. We are smoothing pathways into the University System, and we are finding more ways to serve a higher percentage of traditional students, adult learners, and military students.

We aren't just focused on getting students in the door; we are also working hard to ensure that we attract and retain the best faculty and staff to serve them. In the months ahead, we will be conducting an analysis of faculty salaries, revising guidelines for how we utilize the Faculty Recruitment and Retention fund, and assessing the compensation we offer our SHRA employees.

In addition, our budget and finance team is studying the feasibility of consolidating the University System's debt management. By channeling all debt through the UNC System Office, we could potentially help institutions borrow money at a lower rate, streamline the debt issuance process, reduce workload at the institutional level, and take advantage of higher economies of scale.

And we are evaluating new approaches that will make North Carolina's higher education system more robust and more efficient than it already is. Building on our success implementing the 120-credit hour policy, we are exploring new ways to streamline our practices. We are studying how to enhance fiduciary efficiencies and maximize the advantages of our shared services. Our current effort to make summer school the norm rather than an exception is an example of the work we are doing to make more efficient use of our facilities. This work doesn't just save the University System money ... it also promotes retention and improves students' odds of graduating in four years.

These are just a few of the highlights of our meeting. These highlights don't paint a complete picture of all our activity, but they sketch out the vast scope and ambition of the work ahead.

Against this backdrop, chancellor searches are underway at UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC School of the Arts, and UNC Charlotte. Shortly, the search process will also be underway at East Carolina University and Fayetteville State University. The next era of leadership will soon be in place at these institutions, and this will help maintain the critical momentum that has been building in pursuit of our Strategic Plan goals. I would like to thank Lynn Duffy and Scott Murray for their hard work leading these efforts.

Following last week's meeting with Chair Ramsey and Vice Chair Murphy, I couldn't help but reflect on all that our Board, our chancellors, and the System Office staff are doing to make the UNC System more productive and also more efficient. We are teaching more students, generating cutting-edge research, and engaging the communities around us ... all while containing or lowering tuition costs for our students.

I am proud to be a part of this effort, and I would like to thank the Board for giving me the opportunity to serve as the interim president. It is a singular honor and privilege.

Walking around the ECSU campus, it's hard not to absorb the excitement that the students, faculty, and administration feel, knowing that ECSU once again has strong wind in its sails. With the Vikings once again on the move, this institution is serving more students and it is serving them better. And, it is having a more significant impact in northeastern North Carolina, across the state, and throughout the region.

As we are all gathered here, it's worth remembering that, collectively, we are a part of this same effort, whether we are in Elizabeth City or from as far away as Cullowhee. That should give us a tremendous sense of pride in the work that we do.

Thank you.