

Interim President Roper's Report to the UNC Board of Governors March 20, 2020

Greetings everyone.

I want to devote the first portion of my address to a special guest speaker, who will update you further about coronavirus/COVID-19 matters.

Dr. David Weber is an internist, infectious disease specialist, and epidemiologist. He is the medical director of hospital epidemiology at UNC Hospitals and associate chief medical officer for UNC Health.

He is going to speak briefly and then can take a few questions. His accompanying slides were sent to you earlier and are posted on Board Effect.

As you all know, we are in the midst of a very serious health crisis. COVID-19 presents the UNC System and North Carolina with some unprecedented challenges.

Thank you Dr. Weber for your insight on this matter.

On a personal note, my son, who is a resident at UNC Health, was talking with my wife and I, and he offered us this reflection: "We will get past this, but to get past it we need to get through it."

I say this myself based on my own experience as a healthcare professional. I am confident that things are going to get better. But I am also confident that it's going to get worse before it gets better ... but it will get better.

I've been truly impressed with all of the work taking place at our 17 institutions and affiliates. In the face of trying circumstances, we are all working together toward a common end ... with an inspiring spirit of collaboration.

In the course of a few short weeks, our institutions have adapted quickly to a rapidly changing environment:

- We've recalled our students travelling abroad.
- In light of the CDC guidance announced this week, we have directed each institution to cancel or postpone gatherings that assemble 50 or more individuals.
- And we are mindful of the CDC's additional guidance to try to avoid crowds of more than 10 people.
- All University-sponsored travel outside North Carolina has been suspended.

- Our System-wide move from in-person instruction to a system of alternative course delivery is progressing.
- And I'm proud to share that more than 95 percent of UNC System classes are now online-ready. Our institutions tackled this challenge in two weeks, which is remarkable.
- We continue to substantially reduce the number of students on campus and in university housing by requiring that students who want to stay on campus get permission to do so.
- Originally, we tried encouraging students to stay away. This opt-out approach saw 30-40 percent of students remaining on campus. By shifting to a policy of requiring students to seek permission to stay on campus, we hope to see the number of those who remain fall closer to 10 percent on each campus.
- Importantly, we also understand that for some students, their only access to online course resources, housing, and food may be through their campus residence halls and dining facilities. Our institutions will continue to serve these students. Our institutions are doing the critical work to ensure that those students who remain have facilities that are safe, and that effective quarantine and isolation plans are in place, should they be needed.

Unfortunately, that time frame reaches into our commencement season. Simply put, we are facing the increasing likelihood that spring graduation ceremonies will be disrupted. I know and understand that this will disappoint our students and their families, who have worked toward this goal for so many years. But the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff must be our top priority. We will work with our Chancellors as they consider how to celebrate academic achievement in due course. Plans for each university will be individualized by the universities.

Quite naturally, students and parents have contacted the System Office and our institutions with questions and concerns. There are many, many moving parts to this situation ... and they are moving very quickly. We are applying the principles of triage, dealing with the most acute items first, but I promise you that we are working to deal with all issues as quickly and as thoughtfully as we can.

We are addressing the most critical issues first: health and safety, the transition to online learning, and the well-being of our students in need. Matters related to fees, room and board, and grades are also important... We expect to be in position to start to answer those questions in the next week.

COVID-19 might be front and center on everyone's minds this week. But it is not the only significant challenge we face. The state budget stalemate continues to disrupt the University's capacity to serve its students and North Carolina.

Since our last meeting, I've visited Western Carolina, the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics campus in Morganton, and UNC Pembroke, and I've seen firsthand how the failure to enact a budget has been detrimental to our institutions.

The consequences of not having a budget in place reach every corner of the state. Ultimately this impact will be felt most profoundly by our students and the communities we serve.

We had plans to visit ECSU and ECU, and later UNCG and N.C. A&T, but the coronavirus has forced us to postpone those visits.

Elsewhere, our five lab schools across the state are serving as “nutrition hubs” during this crisis. The schools are closed, but school nutrition programs continue. Families can pick up breakfast and lunch for their children who are enrolled and, in many cases, younger siblings.

These are vivid reminders that the UNC System’s work isn’t just good for our students. ... it benefits all North Carolinians.

We are in a moment of national urgency. Now is not the time to let political disagreements hold up funding for our universities, which train, for example, a significant percentage of North Carolina’s health care workers.

Speaking of the NC State Budget, we have two work streams, one is ongoing work regarding the regular state budget process, and the other is a new stream related to financial and other policy issues due to the coronavirus pandemic. Yesterday, in the committee on Budget and Finance, Rep. Fraley strongly urged the Board to continue with these two separate processes for now. They should come together in mid/late April.

I would like to conclude by drawing your attention to some important positive news that should not be overlooked.

Chancellor searches continue at four of our institutions.

- UNC Charlotte’s search committee is on track to present no fewer than two candidates to me by the end of March.
- The School of the Arts search committee anticipates sending me its top candidates in April.
- Although COVID-19 has delayed search timelines at ECU and FSU, both institutions anticipate having new chancellors named for the fall term.

This week, Dr. Andrew Kelly and his team in Strategy and Policy released the latest numbers on each of our institutions’ individual progress toward their Strategic Plan goals. I would encourage everyone to visit the System Office’s strategic planning website to learn more.

It is very good news, and I would like to single out two points.

- Three institutions met or exceeded their annual targets on all five of their priority metrics: UNC Greensboro, NC State, and UNC Charlotte

- I would like to specifically congratulate UNCG. Under Chancellor Gilliam's leadership, the university is the only institution to meet annual targets on all nine strategic plan metrics this year.

COVID-19 and the ongoing budget crisis present significant challenges to our capacity to maintain this truly remarkable momentum. But witnessing our faculty, students, families and leaders at every level of the UNC System, rallying together. That has filled me with great optimism. These are challenging times, and we will not get everything right, but we will make corrections as we move forward. The UNC System is rising to this challenge. And we are deeply grateful for the Board of Governors leadership and guidance.

Thank you ... and be well.