

Fred Chappell

## POET LAUREATE TO DELIVER COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Fred D. Chappell, who was recently named poet laureate of North Carolina, will deliver the spring commencement address at East Carolina University on May 16.

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More than 2,000 degree candidates are expected for the 89th spring commencement, scheduled for Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium. The public is invited.

ECU's Spring
Commencement

Chancellor Richard Eakin said, "We are honored that the poet laureate of North Carolina will address our graduates. Fred Chappell is known and recognized throughout the state and nation not only for his writing but for his teaching and encouragement of future generations of authors and poets. We look forward to welcoming him to our campus."

ANew Book About Chappell Chappell has been a member of the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro since 1964. He teaches advanced composition, poetry and fiction, and he is the author of seven novels, 14 volumes of poetry, a book of essays and two books of short stories.

More News Releases His work has received wide critical recognition. His poems are the subject of a new book of essays, <u>Dream Garden: The Poetry of Fred Chappell</u>, edited by Dr. Patrick Bizzaro of the ECU English Department.

Return to News and Events Chappell's most recent novel, "Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You," was released in 1996. His most recent book of poetry, "Spring Garden: New and Collected Poems," was published in 1995. His collection of essays on poetry, titled "Plow Naked," was released in the fall of 1993. He is working on a new novel, "Look Back All the Green Valley," and a new collection of poems, "Family Gathering." A new book of criticism, "A Way of Happening," will be released in March.



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## Commencement Address: Teaching Principles Apply to Life

By Richard H. L. Marks

Professor of Biochemistry, School of Medicine - 1998 UNC Board of Governors Excellence in Teaching Award Recipient

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art of the requirement for teaching awards at this university is that the nominee must prepare a portfolio of supporting materials, one of which is a statement of teaching philosophy. This was a valuable experience for me, because it made me put into words things that I had previously felt, but had really taken for granted. Having had the experience of doing this, I can say that I think it would be an important exercise for all teachers to do. In fact, I think the experience is valuable for anyone to do, regardless of occupation. This process makes you ask questions of yourself: What is important about what I am doing? What do I really think about the day-to-day activities I am involved in? How could I improve what it is I am doing, both for my own good as well as the good of my students, or clients, or patients, or whomever I am serving?

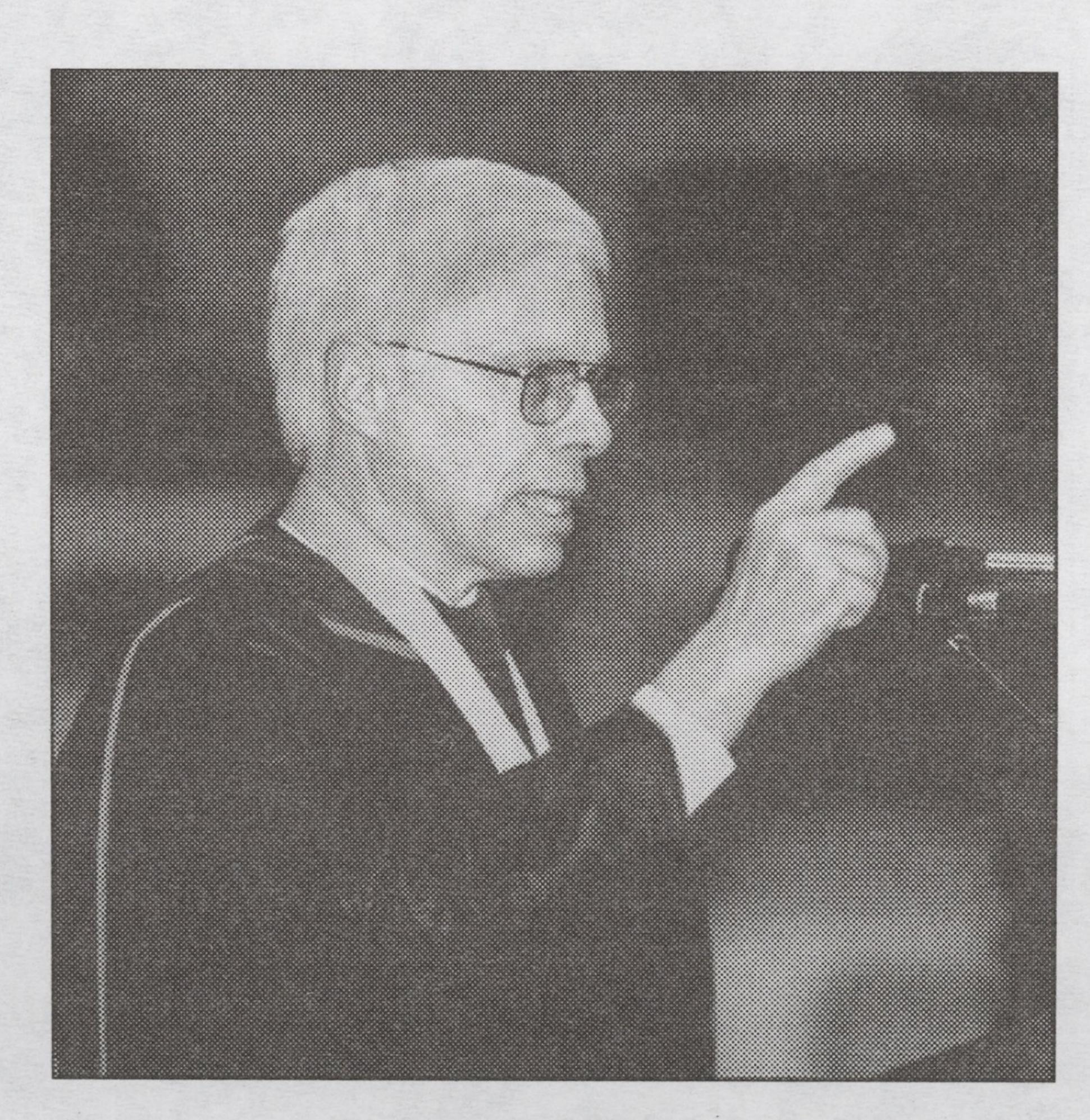
I would like to share with you today my philosophy of teaching. "Why?" you might ask. "If I am not going to be a teacher, what good is this to me?"

There are several reasons that I would like to share these with all of you, not just those who might be going into an educational field. One is that you are graduating from East Carolina University, a school that has a rich tradition of teacher training. Even though we are called East Carolina University now, before that we were East Carolina College, and before that, East Carolina Teachers' College. Teacher training was the primary focus for many of its years, and it is still a significant part of its mission, for ECU is heavily involved in education of educators. This is part of the history of your alma mater, part of your legacy, and it always will be. A second reason, and perhaps a stronger one, is that whatever your occupation, there will be times when you will be a teacher perhaps in your home, as you teach your children; perhaps on the job, where you train a co-worker; perhaps in the classroom if you become a professional educator. We each become teachers in our own ways in our daily activities. A third reason I would like to share my teaching philosophy with you is that most of the things that I feel are important about the teaching profession are really rather generally applicable to other fields as well. I'd like to propose that you consider these things in whatever job you may have in the future.

That is a good teacher? All of us, at one time or other in our educational lives, have picked out teachers who were really special, who had a particular knack to help us learn—no, more than that—to help us want to learn. We have also had, I am sure, experiences at the other extreme (somewhere else, of course, certainly not here at ECU!). What makes the difference? What are some of the qualities that we recognize in a good teacher?

The first element I would suggest to you is that a good teacher must have a commanding knowledge of his or her subject area. This is an essential component for any type of job, and you have just finished another stage in that process of becoming knowledgeable about your particular field. Some of you are going on to graduate school, to build further on that knowledge base. Others are going to "try out their wings" and enter the job market. In the teaching profession, there is no substitute for having a broad perspective of the subject before going into the classroom—you never know what question a student may ask about a subject, and it is really clear when a teacher is ill prepared. On the other hand, the good teacher will recognize that no one knows everything about a given subject, and thus will feel comfortable in saying, "I don't know, but I'll find out." Even better in an

educational setting would be, "Let's see if we can find the answer together." That would provide the opportunity to show the student how to gather information from a variety of sources to attack a problem. The willingness to learn, to improve one's knowledge base in order to do a better job is an asset in any field. The good teacher, the good lawyer, the good businessman or businesswoman must always be willing to remain a learner. The best will do this—not grudgingly, but will maintain a constant desire to learn to do the job better. Most professions not only support, but require continuing education for their employees to remain current in their fields. Even though you may be ending your formal education today, always be willing to continue being a student, a learner, to increase your knowledge base.



RICHARD MARKS

Knowledge of the subject, however, does not in itself suffice. We have all had experience with a professor who is brilliant, but who cannot get across even the simplest of concepts to his class. Thus, I think a second element in becoming a good teacher, or being good in any job situation, is the ability to take the knowledge you have and apply it in a creative way. In a classroom, this may mean using modern technologies to help students understand difficult concepts. We use computers in the classroom. We use books, papers, small group discussions, distancelearning as educational opportunities. Different students learn in different ways, and a good educator will try to provide students with a variety of learning opportunities in an effort to find and take advantage of that "teachable moment." Likewise, creative approaches to solving business problems, to treating patients, to building a trust relationship with your clients will reward both you and the beneficiaries of your creativity.

A good teacher must be demanding—not in the sense of being mean-spirited, but in requiring a student to put forth his or her best effort. Most people will tend to live up (or down) to the expectations others have of them; in a student-teacher situation, if the teacher has high expectations of the student, the student is more likely to be motivated to work hard to learn. This quality is not unique to teachers and students. In any human interaction, whether job-related or not, we feed off the expecta-

tions of others. Whatever position you may have, expect the best of your colleagues, your clients, your family. As long as these expectations are realistic, they can build relationships that will be a significant benefit to your endeavors.

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A good teacher must be willing and able to listen to and to understand students. He or she must be sensitive to whether a student is following and responding to the educational effort. How many of us remember the teacher who took that extra time to make sure that we really understood? Again, this is an important quality in any interaction, whether it be in education, or law, or medicine, or business. Pay attention to the needs of those around you; be sensitive to the way that you are coming across to others. You may lose a little in time, but you will gain in the respect and admiration others have for you.

A good teacher must help students help themselves. She or he must instill in the students the desire to learn, to help students think for themselves. Delivery of facts is not sufficient—that is not education. Textbooks, libraries, and now the Internet abound with facts (although in the latter case, particularly, we are not always sure what the "facts" are). What a good teacher does is to help the student to see the inter-relationships among the pieces of information being presented, to help the student learn how to distill the information in a manner that makes it easier to understand, to help the student critically evaluate "the facts" to reach a reasonable conclusion. The good teacher must always be a questioner—asking, "Why?"... asking, "How do these things we talked about relate to one another?"... asking, "How could you find out the answer to that?" Likewise, the good physician will not just provide a pill to patients, but will help them help themselves to become well by listening to them, by helping them to educate themselves about their disease, by helping them to learn how better to take care of themselves. A good social worker will help clients to learn how to help pick themselves up. Whatever we do, there are opportunities to educate others to help themselves. The reward is in the joy that we may have helped a person become a little more independent and self-sufficient.

I inally, a good teacher must treat the student with I respect and dignity. A teacher maintains a certain air of authority in a classroom, and that is as it should be. Often in such a situation there is a tendency to exercise that authority in a way that the student feels demeaned. However, in order for a good learning environment to exist, there must be mutual respect. How often do we see this—the person in a lower position not treated with the respect due to each of us as human beings?

As you go forth from this place today and into a new phase of your lives, strive for these principles:

- · Know your subject or your work area, but always be ready to learn more about it.
- · Be creative, not only in your workplace, but in your interactions with others.
- · Be demanding of yourself and those around you in order to, as the Army says, "be the best you can be."
- · Be willing to listen to those around you, especially those you are serving.
  - · Help others to help themselves.
  - Treat others with respect and dignity.

I think the interactions between student and teacher embraced by these principles can set apart a good teacher from an average one. I submit also that they are worth considering for all of you, no matter what your field. The best of luck to you all.