

**Critical Issues for East Carolina University**  
**General Themes**  
*November 19, 2003*

To better understand the near-term challenges facing East Carolina University during this period of transition, Vice Chancellors, Deans and unit heads were asked to identify those *critical issues* that face the University in general as well as their specific areas of responsibility. Through a related process, issues important to our students were solicited by the Vice Chancellor for Student Life. In response, valuable and detailed input was submitted, compiled and sorted into related topics. The following reflects the general themes of the critical issues identified. This document is intended to provide a catalyst for further discussion with campus constituents, leading to actions and decisions that align with the highest priorities of our university.

**1. Maintaining Momentum**

ECU must continue to push forward with the positive initiatives that support the four areas of emphasis for the campus (Teacher Education, Human Health, Cultural Enrichment and Economic Development). Some examples include:

- Identifying and establishing "centers of excellence"
- Implementation of engineering program
- Establishment of new graduate programs
- The Cardiovascular Center
- ECU-PCMH/UHS partnerships
- ECU partnerships with the City and other agencies for mutually beneficial projects (e.g. 10<sup>th</sup> Street connector)
- Educational partnerships with the Military
- Sustainable Tourism Center
- The Centennial Campaign
- A Performing Arts Center
- Alumni Center/Welcome Center
- Development of new 124 acre recreation site
- Downtown redevelopment efforts
- Outreach to communities in Eastern North Carolina
- A comprehensive marketing and communication initiative
- Conference affiliation opportunities

**2. Leadership**

Both interim and future permanent campus leaders (Chancellor, Vice Chancellors, etc.) must not only demonstrate vision, enthusiasm and energy but also a high level of integrity and a love for this university. Competency and experience are necessary but not enough. They must have an understanding of the culture and

history of the campus and of eastern North Carolina, a sensitivity for the people who have contributed to the success of ECU, a recognition of the regional pride of our citizens in the institution as well as their concern for our "status" within the UNC system. These leaders must be committed to an honest, open, and consultative leadership style that recognizes the role of shared governance. Trust and confidence in administrative leaders must be restored and maintained.

### **3. Mission**

It is time to step back and re-examine who and what we are and "what we want to be when we grow up". We must realistically assess our ability to grow total enrollments to the level projected and the implications that will have on quality of the "student experience", budgetary resources, facilities/space, faculty and staff support, curriculum, organization, etc. What is the level of commitment to graduate and professional schools? Will our capital facilities plan and the outlook for another UNC bond issue match up with our goals? How do we avoid spreading ourselves too thin? Is our intent to achieve Research-Extensive Carnegie classification? All of these questions should be addressed through the strategic planning process.

### **4. Research**

If ECU is to progress as a research-intensive institution, appropriate academic and administrative emphasis is needed to accommodate that goal. The hiring of research faculty requires the investment of resources for start-up packages, lab space, equipment and other support. At the same time, the campus research administrative infrastructure requires significant enhancement. Highly qualified and experienced staff with backgrounds in large research enterprises is needed to assist in building both the pre-award and post-award functions. Improved administrative systems are also needed. Additional graduate student support and tuition waivers are necessary to move to this next level. Implementation of the ECU Research Institute should be advanced. Continued development of the IT infrastructure, facilities and related academic curriculum must progress simultaneously to promote innovative technologies for both researchers and students. ECU should establish a goal (with a plan and timeline for achieving that goal) of \$100 million annually in grant and contract support.

### **5. Budget Adequacy**

After a number of years of permanent budget reductions, reversions and the last minute "confiscation" of funds to deal with the State's budget crises, virtually all units on campus have identified budget issues as being critical. Adequacy of operating budgets, support staffing, laboratory support, instructional and scientific equipment replacement/maintenance funds is becoming more and more a problem. Exasperating this issue is a lack of confidence and/or understanding of how new funding for on-campus and DE enrollment growth is allocated to units and departments. A clear, open and equitable method for distributing new resources (DE especially) is needed that fairly addresses academic workload. Budgetary resources must align with the identified strategic priorities of the

University. At the same time, strategies are needed to pursue additional resources for the Brody School of Medicine, new academic programs (especially at the graduate level), and existing programs with special requirements. The expansion of the resource base should include attention to state funding, research grants and contracts and private support.

#### **6. Personnel Compensation**

In light of no or only negligible permanent salary increases for most employees in the last several years, compensation issues are directly impacting our ability to recruit and retain a highly motivated and competent workforce. This situation has been made more problematic by the increase in the cost of family health insurance coverage and the reduction in the State's contribution to the State Retirement Plan (though they claim it is still adequately funded on an actuarial basis). Morale is suffering, leading to more compensation equity complaints. In some units and departments, new hires at market rates are creating additional salary compression or inversion (e.g. new hires earning more than long term employees). In lieu of compensation adjustments, the university should explore other benefits and services that would assist faculty and staff.

#### **7. Facilities**

With the growth in student enrollment has come the growth in faculty and support staff positions. Unfortunately, this positive circumstance has had negative implications for facilities, both in the short and long term. Many units that have received additional faculty positions do not have sufficient office space in their current locations for the new hires. A number of the colleges report that they already have faculty members distributed in different locations and the positions to be filled for Fall 2004 will worsen that situation. New construction, major renovation projects and the relocation of Nursing and Allied Health to the learning village will alleviate some of that problem but that will come a little too late for the issues arising in the next two years. An updated and enrollment driven facility plan is need to ascertain the extent and timing of the faculty office space problem and possible solutions. This in turn will drive the continued need for campus expansion and further property acquisitions. In addition, some facilities (e.g. Howell Science Complex) are still in need of major and costly renovations that will require their closure for extended periods of time. The absence of essential Repair and Renovation funding has grown to the critical stage and puts the campus in the kind of jeopardy already experienced at other UNC schools.

#### **8. Diversity**

There continues to be a need for a clear and well-focused diversity initiative that is comprehensive in nature, improves communication and unites the campus community. Diversity must become an institutional priority. With the need to expand the benefits of higher education to all segments of our ever-changing population, diversity is too important a matter to be consigned to a department or a committee. Commitment and energy has to come from the top of the institution. Therefore, it is imperative that the senior administrative leaders thoughtfully

develop and issue their own statements on diversity and its importance in fulfilling the State's mandate to our citizens. Diversity-related matters must be incorporated **not only** into the portfolios of each administrator, faculty member and professional staff member but, whether as a problem, an issue or an opportunity, the goal of making the University more INCLUSIVE must be embraced in their hearts and demonstrated by their actions.

#### **9. Athletics**

Intercollegiate Athletics provides one of the most visible and cost effective forms of marketing the university to prospective students, alumni, donors and constituents. It is critically important that our programs are competitive on the field, demonstrate the highest degree of integrity and good sportsmanship, are administered in full compliance with NCAA requirements and support the academic goals of our student athletes. There are several issues that must be considered to maintain the overall progress and momentum of the program. First, the effect of conference realignment on the athletics program as well as the positive impact of ECU's position in the restructured Conference USA must be effectively communicated. The resulting financial ramifications of the changes that have occurred in conference membership must be analyzed and addressed in projected budgets. With the increase in expenses (particularly financial aid for student-athletes), it is critical that the Athletics Department manage its resources wisely while at the same time develop additional sources of revenue. Also, even though there have not been lapses in this area, due to the increase in the volume of work in the compliance and eligibility areas, forthcoming recommendations regarding the overall operation of the compliance office will require consideration and implementation.

#### **10. Student Issues**

While certain "routine" campus issues (e.g. parking, transit, safety, lighting, food quality/price, etc.) are certainly on the radar screen of our students, they focus as well on some challenges that certainly fit the description of "critical". Academic advising requires additional improvement since not all advisors understand the policies and the curriculum adequately enough to provide sound and accurate advice (especially given the restructuring of the colleges). The current topic of departmental graduation ceremonies is of obvious concern. The potential change in the UNC cap on out-of-state students raises concerns about access for student from eastern North Carolina. Diversity, though specific comments are merged into that category above, has the attention and passion of our students. They also are unaware of any formal student grievance policy on discrimination or harassment. These all tend to be topics that have the attention of the administration and will remain a priority for action.