UNC Engagement Report
2016 Update: Executive Summary
Creating Impact in North Carolina Communities and the Economy

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Office of International, Community, and Economic Engagement
UNC General Administration
UNC Engagement Report 2016: Update

Background

In 2015, in response to the call in the UNC Board of Governors’ Strategic Plan to develop a system-wide “engagement report,” the University of North Carolina’s Office of International, Community and Economic Engagement released its first-ever report on the community and economic engagement activity of our 17 campus system. The report was developed with the leadership of two system-wide councils, the UNC Economic Transformation Council (made up of the lead economic development officers on each campus) and the UNC Engagement Council (made up of the top public service or community engagement officers on each campus). It aims to describe and measure some of the ways in which UNC campuses were connecting to their surrounding communities through teaching, research and public service activities and to track progress in these areas over time.

The Community and Economic Engagement report purposely focuses on a small number of indicators that would be:

- Relevant: Where possible, we sought indicators measuring activities that the overwhelming majority of UNC campuses were participating in.
- Significant: With limited resources, we selected indicators we believed would tell us something meaningful about economic and community engagement activity on the 17 UNC campuses.
- Measurable: We looked for indicators that campuses could gather accurate data on without having to hire additional staff.
- ‘Effectable’: We included only indicators we believed that campuses could change through intentional effort over time.

Even with an eighteen month planning effort, some of the data sought in the earlier 2015 report proved difficult to gather. In many cases, the data had not been collected before or had been collected only sporadically, in preparation for accreditation efforts, award applications, or requests. After a thorough review of the challenges that campuses faced preparing data for last year’s report, the 2016 Community and Economic Engagement report update is shorter, with improved collection of data for both individual campuses and the system as a whole.

Reporting on a system level on engagement efforts is uncharted territory – no other public higher education system is currently doing this. And while there are several national groups seeking to develop engagement metrics, there is no consensus yet on exactly which indicators matter for assessing campus-level activity. The result is that, for now, there are no national benchmarks to measure our engagement against, and, instead, campuses will need to look at their own improvement year-to-year. We hope that by beginning to track these indicators here, we can develop a useful baseline to assess UNC’s outreach and engagement in North Carolina over time.
Executive Summary

When North Carolina’s public universities are working on projects, research or service in North Carolina communities, everyone wins. Students get hands-on opportunities to learn; faculty and staff get a chance to test out their knowledge, research or projects in real-world settings; government and nonprofit organizations get new ideas for how to solve some of their trickiest problems. Businesses get support or access to research or technology. Community members get access to inspirational performances, thought-provoking discussions; and lifelong learning. Along the way, everyone learns. Our state gets better together.

This report is the second in an ongoing effort to describe and quantify what the UNC system’s community and economic engagement adds up to. The short answer: a lot.

During the academic year 2014-2015:

- Faculty taught hundreds of courses that sent students into their surrounding communities to test out and apply their learning in businesses, nonprofits and governmental agencies. Reported numbers are up 12% over the previous year.
- UNC researchers conducted nearly $1 billion worth of research on four key sectors of the state’s economy: life sciences, engineering, education and agriculture. About $100 million of this research was conducted in collaboration with community groups.
- Universities help meet the state’s huge and growing need for continuing education; there were 1.7 million enrollments in such non-academic credit courses.
- State-serving entities ranging from the Small Business and Technology Development Center to Industry Expansion Solutions to Cooperative Extension, from the Area Health Education Centers to the School of Government provided hands-on assistance to more than 6 million people in North Carolina, including individuals, businesses large and small, health care providers and government officials.

The activity of our universities in our communities is significant and we should increase awareness of it through regular reports to state and local leaders. In addition, though, we need help from the UNC Board of Governors in supporting development of thoughtful, data-driven approaches in at least two critical efforts going forward:

- Employers of all kinds increasingly look to recent graduates to be able to immediately address their talent shortfalls. We need to launch new dialogue with the employment community about roles and responsibilities in addressing this “talent gap.” In the meantime, the Board should continue to support expansion of applied learning opportunities for students, inside and outside the classroom, during their college careers.
- Automation and globalization are accelerating the rate of economic and societal change. Universities have a growing responsibility to help communities manage through this change. The Board should expand support for research into the ongoing economic transition and increase support for campus-based efforts to expand services to adults needing new skills and knowledge, through both for-credit and noncredit education offerings.
Report Highlights

The 2015 *UNC Engagement Report* represented a first-ever effort to measure the community and economic engagement activity of all UNC campuses. Using data from the 2013-2014 academic year, we described the UNC system’s institutional and system-wide connections to the state of North Carolina. This report is an update, with improved data collection from academic year 2014-2015 and highlights of several areas of special interest. Building off of a recommendation in the 2013-2018 UNC strategic plan, *Our Time, Our Future,* this update, together with the 2015 report, begins to build a foundation of information that will help set baselines so that trends and progress can be assessed going forward. The report breaks the key findings into three sections, corresponding with the university’s three-part mission of teaching, research and public service:

I. Getting Students Ready to Connect

UNC campuses provide students numerous academic courses that enable them to engage with community partners – government, nonprofits and for-profit entities – as well as the opportunity to learn entrepreneurial skills.

- In academic year 2014-2015, there were nearly 84,000 enrollments in ‘community-based’ academic courses (those involving an internship, co-op, clinical, practica’ or other external experiential opportunity), with all sixteen four-year campuses reporting such courses. While this number is up about 12% from the previous year, we do not know how much of the increase resulted from increased student interest in these courses versus improved identification of such courses by campuses or both. Regardless, it is a large number.

- ‘Community-engaged’ courses are a subset of ‘community-based’ courses and involve more intense activity by students, sometimes called ‘service learning.’ This year’s reported numbers of enrollments in these courses are up. Eleven campuses reported courses like these, with 26,000 enrollments, up more than 50% from the prior academic year. Again, since campuses are still developing their collection processes, we do not know how much of the increase resulted from increased interest and/or from improved counting.

- Twelve campuses reported students taking courses of study resulting in an “entrepreneurial” credential. In academic year 2014-2015, there were 561 of these credentials awarded, a 28% increase over academic year 2013-2014. The biggest growth was in the number of students graduating with entrepreneurship “minors,” up 68% from the previous year.

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\(^1\) Practica are courses requiring students to participate in an approved project or proposal that practically apply previously studied theory of the discipline under the supervision of an expert or qualified representative of the field.
II. The Impact of UNC Research on the Economy and the Community

As noted in this year’s 2015 President’s Report on Research and Sponsored Programs, sponsored research at UNC is at an all-time high, with research and development contract and grant awards to UNC faculty this year totaling $1.36 billion. The research activity funded by these awards creates economic impact, with funding going to hire employees, support students, purchase equipment and supplies, and construct space. In this report, we look at some other ways of describing the impact of UNC research on constituencies and communities in North Carolina by reporting on how researchers work with community partners through “engaged research.” ² Among the findings:

- UNC researchers conducted research in key sectors important to the North Carolina economy, including $600 million in health and life sciences, $127 million in engineering, $109 million in education and $86 million in agriculture.
- Almost $100 million in research funding went to “community-engaged” activities.
- Industries sponsored about $75 million in research on UNC campuses last year, with $23 million of that coming from North Carolina companies.
- UNC institutions reported 31 startups or spinoffs based on UNC research and technology.

III. Public Service Work in the Economy and the Community - Building the ‘Communiversity’

As public universities, UNC’s campuses also undertake a variety of activities that may not fall into the traditional teaching or research categories, but instead provide a distinct public service to their surrounding communities. Some of these activities are difficult to quantify, such as the participation by campuses in recruitment of new companies, assistance to existing companies, market studies, the indirect results of campus business incubators, service by faculty and staff on nonprofit boards and other activities that contribute to the economic and social health of a community. For this report, we have focused on a small number of indicators.

- In preparation for this report, we asked each campus to identify a small number of projects that represented intentional partnerships for the university with the surrounding community. While this sample did not include all such projects, the projects identified involved more than 17,000 students and more than 1,700 faculty and staff, working in all 100 North Carolina counties.
- System-wide enrollment in face-to-face and online continuing education courses totaled 1.7 million again in academic year 2014-2015.
- Five state-serving agencies within the University of North Carolina provide key service to people across the state. For example:

² Community-engaged research is a framework or approach for conducting research, not a methodology. At the core of all community-engaged research is the understanding that the community will be involved in a meaningful way.
The Cooperative Extension Service, a program of NC State and NC A&T State, delivered non-degree programs to more than 500,000 participants in academic year 2014-2015.

The NC State-based Industry Expansion Solutions, or IES (formerly the Industrial Extension Service), helped industrial clients in 44 counties, with a reported economic impact of $82 million.

The Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC), a system-wide service based at NC State, but with offices on every UNC campus, provided more than 65,000 hours of counseling to small- to medium sized business clients, while also helping UNC General Administration in launching a multi-campus internship program.

UNC-Chapel Hill’s School of Government offered close to 200 courses, webinars, and specialized conferences for almost 13,000 North Carolina public officials.

The Area Health Education Centers, or AHEC, also based at UNC-Chapel Hill, provided educational programs and services to almost 300,000 individuals in all 100 counties.

- Attendance at university-sponsored events – lectures, performances, athletic contests and other activities – totaled more than 6 million at all 17 campuses.

This update provides additional detail and context for these numbers. In addition, on our website are a series of detailed case studies that illustrate what UNC’s engagement looks like in practice.

Taken together, the data and stories provide a valuable snapshot of the work UNC campuses are doing to respond to the needs of the state of North Carolina. As we periodically review this information, we hope to be able to assess progress on campuses over time, to provide groups wishing to engage with our campuses ideas for how to do so, and to enable campuses to learn from the insights and approaches their peer campuses are taking to engage in community and economic development activities.