Bigger, Better and Looking to the Future

Prior to a very welcome holiday break, UNC Charlotte celebrated the midpoint of the academic year by conferring more than 3,300 degrees in our Dec. 13 commencement exercises. These newest alumni, now proudly bearing bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees, comprise our first graduating class since we topped the 27,300 mark in total enrollment this fall. We are bigger – and better – than ever.

As we begin a new calendar year, it’s a nice time to pause and reflect on 2014, a year that was historic in many ways.

The Levine Scholars Program (see the related article on page 10), our prestigious merit-based scholarship program, was formally extended through the year 2024 thanks to a new gift of nearly $13 million from Leon and Sandra Levine through the Leon Levine Foundation. Established in 2009, the Levine Scholars Program recruits extraordinary high school students based on scholarship, ethical leadership, and civic engagement. Starting in 2016, the program will now support up to 20 new recipients annually, up from the current number of 15 students per year. The Levine Scholars Program has had an incredibly positive impact on our campus and will continue to pay important dividends to our city and region for years to come.

Also in 2014, we were thrilled to announce that the UNC Charlotte “Pride of Niner Nation” Marching Band will take the field in fall 2015. The introduction of the marching band will coincide with the 49ers’ ascent into the elite Football Bowl Subdivision as a member of Conference USA. UNC Charlotte alumni Vickie and Gene Johnson have been the driving force behind the band, and they donated $2 million to support this exciting endeavor (see the related article on page 3).

Underscoring the University’s commitment to investing in the future, UNC Charlotte recently saw the plans to open an early college high school on campus come to fruition. In August, this innovative magnet school—the first of its kind for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools—welcomed 100 ninth-graders from across Mecklenburg County who will delve into a curriculum that focuses on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) courses, with a special emphasis on energy and engineering (see related article on page 15). The Charlotte Engineering Early College School is located on the west side of our campus in the shadow of the Energy Production and Infrastructure Center and just down the street from the PORTAL Building, a facility we dedicated just this past spring as the hub of our research partnerships with businesses of all kinds and the headquarters of our very successful business incubator, Ventureprise.

With the new year upon us, I hope you’ll take some time to review this edition with an appreciation of the University’s present state and an eye toward our very bright future. To be sure, a lot of good things have happened at UNC Charlotte since we published our last magazine in September, and these things pave the way for even greater successes to come. It’s a great time to be a 49er!

Cordially,

Philip L. Dubois
Chancellor
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**On the Cover:**  
Big ideas with promise for a big future can be found all over this campus as our students, faculty and staff strive for excellence in learning, teaching and research. The stories highlighted in this edition underscore that mentality and are representative of many more endeavors on campus that qualify as “big.”

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The cover of this edition bears the headline and graphic treatment signifying the theme, “Big Ideas, Big Future.” Typically, we don’t develop our editions around a theme, but we’ve done so this time to complement a special event on campus. You’ll notice special tags on the pages of articles we believe embody big ideas growing on campus, ones we expect will ensure a big future for our University.

Big ideas with promise for a big future actually are percolating on any given day at North Carolina’s urban research university. The stories we’ve highlighted came to our attention through a variety of means. They are representative of many more endeavors on campus that qualify as “big.”

Big is good, but the key word is future. Many of us who communicate on behalf of UNC Charlotte spend a lot of time talking about our present and a considerable amount of effort in recent years cultivating emotional ties based on the University’s singular history. And yet the future beckons each and every day as we go about the business of educating students to make the world better — for themselves and for their communities.

So, as you consume this edition, feel proud of our past and our present. And be mindful of UNC Charlotte’s limitless future.

Regards,

John D. Bland, Editor
Director of Public Relations
First was football, and starting fall 2015, the UNC Charlotte Marching Band will take the field. UNC Charlotte alumni Vickie and Gene Johnson have been the driving force behind the band, and they are donating $2 million to support the endeavor.

This isn’t the first time Vickie and Gene Johnson, members of the classes of 1971 and 1973, have stepped up for the University. Vickie Johnson has two degrees from UNC Charlotte and served on the Alumni Board of Directors. Gene Johnson served as president of the same board and on the Board of Trustees for eight years. He went on to become the first alumnus to chair the trustees, and, in May 2014, became the first alumnus to be awarded an honorary degree from the University.

The gift was announced at the site of the future Vickie and Gene Johnson Marching Band Center, which will be located between Storrs Hall and Robinson Hall for the Performing Arts. Early last year, the University selected the architectural firm Watson, Tate, Savory to design the 6,700-square-foot facility that will house the band’s musical instruments, uniforms and several offices.

Gene and Vickie Johnson stand before a drawing of the upcoming Johnson Marching Band Center.

The band center will be within walking distance of the field and next to University City Boulevard (N.C. 49), where the marching band will practice. A portion of the Johnsons’ gift will go to the band center’s construction.

Another part of the gift will establish the Vickie and Gene Johnson Marching Band Scholarship Fund. Proceeds from a planned $4.5 million permanent endowment will provide funding for scholarships to active members of the marching band.

Last semester, the Department of Music solicited suggestions for the band’s name and received 366 entries. A selection committee chose five names from the entries. Those names were submitted to the students of the UNC Charlotte 49ers Basketball Band and the 49er Drum Line for two rounds of voting. The students overwhelming chose “Pride of Niner Nation,” which was submitted by sophomore Stephen Bendl, a member of the Basketball Band.

$2 Million Gift Boosts Marching Band

81-YEAR-OLD AMONG DECEMBER GRADUATES

Commencement ceremonies celebrate the completion of one’s educational journey – no matter how long it may take. This was especially true for one UNC Charlotte graduate at fall commencement Saturday, Dec. 13.

Barbara Coberly, 81, was among the roughly 3,320 students who gathered with family, friends and others in Halton Arena to receive their undergraduate, master’s or doctoral degrees.

Coberly, a Huntersville resident, received a bachelor’s degree in sociology. According to an article in the Huntersville Herald, Coberly had a 3.9 GPA as of spring 2014. She moved to Huntersville in 2002 to be near family. While in California, she earned an Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts in 1987 from Santa Monica City College. Coberly worked at a Host International California office, where she eventually served as office manager to 300 people. After relocating to Huntersville, she enrolled at UNC Charlotte in 2005 under a program that waived tuition for those older than 65.

“I wanted to finish my degree,” Coberly told the Huntersville Herald. “It had always been in the back of my mind.” In recognition of her academic achievements, she has been inducted in Sigma Alpha Lambda, Phi Kappa Phi and the Golden Key International Honour Society.

UNC Charlotte held two commencement ceremonies. Approximately 2,270 students were awarded bachelor’s degrees, and 1,050 graduate students received their degrees, including 62 doctoral students.
STARTUP COMPANY GETS NATIONAL ENERGY AWARD

SineWatts Inc., a startup company based in Charlotte, in collaboration with UNC Charlotte’s Energy Production and Infrastructure Center (EPIC) as its primary research partner, has been selected for a second Incubator Award from the U.S. Department of Energy’s SunShot Initiative to develop SineWatts’ Inverter Molecule product.

The patent-pending Inverter Molecule is miniaturized for co-packaging with a solar photovoltaic (PV) panel. It is a proprietary all-in-one DC-to-AC (PV to grid) solar power converter. By using the Inverter Molecule device, a solar power plant significantly reduces installation costs and utilities are able to dispatch PV power plants like conventional power plants.

William States Lee College of Engineering faculty members — led by Babak Parkhideh and including Robert Cox and EPIC Director Johan Enslin — will assist SineWatts during the technology development phase.

Parkhideh, an assistant professor of electrical and computing engineering, leads the advanced power electronics team in development of technology and field deployment. Cox, an assistant professor of electrical and computing engineering, is developing the communications platform and advanced analytics for improved plug-and-play performance and efficiencies.

The Department of Energy’s SunShot Initiative is a collaborative national effort

to drive innovation to make solar energy cost-competitive with traditional energy sources before the end of the decade. Through SunShot, the Energy Department is supporting efforts by private companies, universities and national laboratories to reduce the cost of solar electricity to $0.06 per kilowatt-hour.

LEE COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING CELEBRATES LEGACY, IMPACT

Almost a half-century old, the William States Lee College of Engineering has a rich history of educating engineers and technologists who have made significant contributions to their professions and communities.

The impact of these contributions is the college’s legacy and the focus of a recent celebration — the Engineering Legacy Banquet.

“The purpose of the event was to honor the many contributions of our students, faculty and industry partners,” said Stamie Despo, alumni and external relations coordinator for Lee College of Engineering.

“At the same time we wanted to expose this legacy to our current students, as we prepare them to be tomorrow’s leaders.”

Lee College Dean Bob Johnson quoted college namesake Bill Lee, who encouraged them to “Keep your commitment to excellence for continuous improvement … Seek to continually improve, plan it, do it, measure it, change it and repeat the cycle. Ethical leadership and ethical behavior have always been important, and now more than ever we need to elevate the visibility and awareness of the importance of ethics.

“This is, of course, increasingly driven by the pace of change in our nation, but also the ever-faster pace of change in other nations, many with traditions and mores different from ours. So, as we engage worldwide, we must be acutely conscious of our values.”

Noted Johnson, “Twenty years later, these words still describe the overarching culture of our college, with its strength in applied engineering, commitment to ethics and collaboration across the Carolinas and beyond.”

HEBERLIG NAMED CO-WINNER OF PRESTIGIOUS HARDEMAN PRIZE

Eric Heberlig, professor of political science, is co-recipient of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation’s D.B. Hardeman Prize for the work “Congressional Parties, Institutional Ambition and the Financing of Majority Control.”

GIVING GREEN CONTRIBUTIONS RISE, EXCEED $181,000

University leaders lauded the campus’s community of givers whose Giving Green contributions and pledges totaled $181,395.27 for the 2014 campaign.

Chancellor Philip L. Dubois noted employee generosity will enhance the work of the Arts & Science Council, agencies affiliated with the State Employees Combine Campaign and the UNC Charlotte Foundation.

Giving Green co-chair Darin Spease, senior associate athletics director, echoed the chancellor. “What a great testament to our campus of givers — you are awesome,” he said.

Director of Early College Programs and Giving Green co-chair Michele Howard also expressed her appreciation for Giving Green participants. “You are our heroes. So, thanks again for joining us under our Giving Green Big Top,” she said. “This year’s campaign has focused on the power of our Giving Green spirit to showcase how when we come together as a campus community, magnificent results are achieved.”

The 2014 Giving Green total reflected a 17 percent increase from the 2013 drive.
The $10,000 Hardeman Prize is awarded for the best book on the U.S. Congress from the fields of biography, history, journalism and political science. Candidates are judged on their contribution to scholarship and the public’s understanding of Congress, as well as on literary craftsmanship, originality and depth of research. Heberlig’s co-author was Bruce Larson, an associate professor of political science at Gettysburg College.

**LANDRUM, WILLIAMS RECEIVE PRESTIGIOUS GOVERNOR’S AWARD**

David Landrum and James Williams are the most recent UNC Charlotte employees to be recognized with the Governor’s Award for Excellence, the highest honor bestowed on a state employee.

Landrum, an office manager in the Communication Studies Department, was honored in the category of public service. For eight years, Landrum has worked as a mentor to a student in the Gaston County Schools.

When the mentorship began, Landrum’s mentee was struggling and had several challenges. “Landrum went above the expectations of a mentor by fully dedicating himself to improving this child’s life,” the nomination said.

“Each Friday, he takes time to eat lunch with his mentee at school,” the nomination continued. “He spends time in his mentee’s classes and encourages him in a variety of subjects.

“Additionally, he has met with his mentee’s legal guardians so that he can continue mentoring this child beyond school hours. With their support, he joins in family activities, helps with homework, ensures his mentee has school supplies, clothing and has even assisted with field trip costs. With David’s help, this challenged child has grown into a teenager with a bright future ahead.”

Nominated in the category of efficiency and innovation, Williams is the renovations supervisor in facilities operations within the Facilities Management Department. He built a business case to restore the Renovations Shop, which was disbanded several years ago.

In the past two years, the reconstituted Renovations Shop has saved the University tens of thousands of dollars, according to nomination materials. By building partnerships and trust through timely, quality work, Williams and his staff have consistently earned accolades from campus customers. During the last fiscal year, the shop reported completing all projects on time and for less money than outside contractors. He was one of UNC Charlotte’s Employees of the Year for 2014.

This was the third consecutive year that UNC Charlotte has had at least one employee honored with this statewide award.

**DANCE MARATHON, OTHER EVENTS RAISE $49,000 TO BENEFIT HOSPITAL**

More than 600 UNC Charlotte students danced the night away in support of the Levine Children’s Hospital (LCH). The Charlotte Dance Marathon last November capped fundraising events across campus that raised $49,015.

“One hundred percent of the marathon proceeds stay at the Levine Children’s Hospital, so as students, we get to see all of our efforts make a concrete local impact,” said Kelsey Mongeau, a senior majoring in public health and sociology from Hampstead, N.C. She also is one of the members of the marathon’s executive board.

The dance marathon, a student-led initiative and legacy project started by the inaugural class of Levine Scholars, is a 12-hour event. Many college campuses across the country conduct such fundraisers. The Charlotte event featured a variety of programs and dancing, as well as food and other activities.

Software and information systems major Elizabeth Koehler of Mooresville, N.C., another member of the executive board, noted the importance of the campus coming together to support an significant community organization such as LCH.

“It (the marathon) can impact families and children for years to come,” Koehler said. “Many students know someone who has been treated at Levine Children’s Hospital, so having a student organization that can directly impact so many people is exciting, and it feels great doing so.”

**ZERO-WASTE INITIATIVE WINS WELLS FARGO GREEN AWARD**

UNC Charlotte’s Zero-Waste Initiative for Richardson Stadium was named the 2014 Wells Fargo Green Award winner at the annual Charlotte Chamber Energy Summit. The University was recognized in the large business category for “its impressive efforts” to eliminate waste in the 16,000-seat stadium.

The 2014 Wells Fargo Green Awards are presented to “member companies who have incorporated innovative, sustainable practices in the products they produce, the services they provide and within the culture of their company.”

The dining services team and Chartwells sourced products that could be fully recycled, such as beverage cups, lids and straws. In addition, the team negotiated packaging alternatives with food providers/national brands and gave them the opportunity to partner in the initiative. Additional time was invested in “waste training” community volunteers who worked concessions during games. Dining services and Chartwells also supported water bottle filling stations; even though, it
CHANCELLOR AWARDED HONORARY DEGREE FROM LONDON UNIVERSITY

Chancellor Philip L. Dubois has received an honorary doctor of arts from Kingston University in London.

In presenting the honorary degree, Julius Weinberg, professor and vice chancellor at Kingston University, said it recognizes the chancellor’s “outstanding contribution to internationalism, specifically to acknowledge the depth and value of the partnership between Kingston University and UNC Charlotte over the past 30 years, which has enhanced the academic life of so many students and staff across both institutions.”

He added that Dubois is a respected academic renowned for outstanding efforts to promote and support education and institutional advancement during a highly successful 40-year career.

UNC Charlotte and Kingston University have been partners since 1981. Cooperation between the institutions covers multiple ways they seek collaboration for mutual benefit and includes student exchanges as well as the involvement of teaching and administrative staff in joint activities.

STUDENT JAMEKA PARKER HONORED FOR SERVICE

Senior Jameka Parker has been recognized for outstanding leadership and service by North Carolina Campus Compact, a statewide network of colleges and universities committed to community engagement. Parker is a recipient of the Community Impact Student Award, which honors one student leader at each member school.

Parker, from Fayetteville, N.C., is one of 18 students across the state to receive the 2014 award, joining more than 200 college students honored by the organization since the award was first presented in 2006.

A pre-service teacher majoring in middle-grades education with a minor in urban youth and communities, Parker said she believes deeply in service learning, both as a civic obligation and as meaningful pedagogy.

As a part of a community-engagement capstone project, Parker started a girls dance troupe in a high poverty middle school and used a curriculum focused on academic achievement, mentoring and self-esteem.

Calling on the fundamentals of participatory action research, she conducted a needs assessment with students and teachers. The resulting program combined dance, academic support and mentoring during a special period of the school day. She recruited fellow UNC Charlotte students to implement the curriculum, which improved student attitudes and school success.

LIBRARY ACQUIRES MOTORSPORTS PHOTO COLLECTION

J. Murrey Atkins Library has acquired the “Bryant McMurray Motorsports Photograph Collection,” which documents the world of stock car racing through images captured during six decades by the award-winning motorsports photographer.

To support UNC Charlotte’s programs in American studies, motorsports engineering and sports management, Atkins Library has developed a collection of books, magazines, oral history interviews, photographs and other materials to preserve the history and legacy of automobile racing in the region.

“McMurray’s photographs will serve as the flagship collection in a digital photo archive we are preparing to launch of images related to and about motorsports,” said Meredith Evans, associate librarian for special collections at Atkins. “Digitizing these photographs and providing access to supporting manuscript and oral history collections will make this the premier motorsports collection in the Southeast.”

The collection contains approximately 500,000 photographs, most of which are negatives, as well as slides and digital photographs. McMurray took the images from the 1960s through 2014, with the bulk of the photos shot between 1969 and 1991. Hundreds of motorsports races and related events at venues around the country are represented in the collection, along with the sport’s most notable drivers and personalities.

McMurray teaches “Motorsports in the South: NASCAR Past and Present” in UNC Charlotte’s American studies program in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. He is past director of photography for Charlotte Motor Speedway, North Carolina Speedway and Bristol Motor Speedway.
UNIVERSITY FORMALLY DEDICATES MARTIN HALL

At UNC Charlotte, buildings are named for people who have dedicated their lives to the betterment of the state, and former Gov. Jim Martin is part of that special group, said Chancellor Philip L. Dubois at a dedication ceremony for Martin Hall.

The chancellor lauded Martin for his support and advancement of higher education that contributed to UNC Charlotte’s development as the state’s urban research university. He also acknowledged former first lady Dottie Martin, the namesake of a scholarship established in 1991 for students studying education with an emphasis on child guidance or counseling.

The 178,000-square-foot Martin Hall, located in East Village, opened for the fall 2014 semester at the site of the former Martin Village, on-campus residences built in the 1970s.

Home to 408 residents, Martin Hall is designed primarily to house upperclassmen. It offers apartments with four single bedrooms in a variety of configurations. The building has two residential wings connected by an expansive two-story lobby. This connector features a 24-hour service desk, group study rooms, TV lounge, gaming area and community kitchen. The area also features a porch and balcony so residents can enjoy the park-like setting in East Village. Additionally, smaller study lounges are located throughout the building.

ETHICS BOWL TEAM PLACES SECOND AT REGIONAL TOURNAMENT

A UNC Charlotte team recently finished second in the Mid-Atlantic Regional Ethics Bowl Tournament and will advance to the National Ethics Bowl Tournament.

The Ethics Bowl is a student competition in which participants must work toward identifying and advocating the best ethical resolution to real-life dilemmas in a timed panel discussion.

“Ethics Bowl participation is an excellent training ground for students who go on to law school, graduate school in any discipline, as well as various professions that require articulate and cogent communicators,” said Beth Mason, a philosophy instructor and the faculty sponsor for the two teams that entered the regional contest.

The Philosophy Department and the Center for Applied and Professional Ethics have co-sponsored UNC Charlotte teams since 2008. This year’s “Team A” will be the first to advance beyond a regional tournament.

In 2013, Mason developed an applied ethics course to serve as a training ground for potential student team members; it is cross-listed with the Communication Studies Department.

RETIR ED PROFESSORS RECEIVE STATE’S HIGHEST CIVILIAN AWARD

Retired University professors Mary Harper and Bertha Maxwell-Roddey have received the state’s highest civilian award, the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

Gov. Pat McCrory chose them for the award. In 1974, Harper and Maxwell-Roddey co-founded the organization that would become the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts + Culture.

They were instructors at UNC Charlotte when they began working to create the Afro-American Cultural and Service Center, according to an article in Qcitymetro. They envisioned the center as a place to preserve and promote the city’s African-American heritage, which was being threatened by urban renewal.

Harper said she has been asked many times whether she envisioned the center as it is today. “I think we both envisioned a center that would serve the people, all the people, and meet the needs of the people,” she said. “I am proud of its growth, and I’m sure we will continue to grow in years to come and serve many generations to come.”
LIGHT-RAIL CONSTRUCTION ARRIVES ON CAMPUS

The CATS Blue Line Extension project, managed by the City of Charlotte Public Transportation Department, continues near campus and toward Center City. Recently, preparations for the light rail to swing onto campus have begun.

Trees across from Miltimore Hall are being removed to accommodate rail tracks and the station that will serve the campus when the line opens in mid-2017 (based upon the current construction schedule). Once the station opens, University leaders anticipate re-planting trees where possible, without obstructing the rail lines.

Following tree removal, work will begin to raise the dirt bed to enable the tracks to rise to the same elevation as a proposed bridge that will span wetland areas and Toby Creek. Erosion-control measures will be deployed, and a haul road will be built to divert construction vehicles off campus roadways.

Once the University station opens, members of the campus community will be able to reach UNC Charlotte Center City in approximately 20 minutes, avoiding traffic congestion and parking costs.

JOINT PROGRAM EXPANDS FUNDING LEVELS FOR RESEARCH

UNC Charlotte’s Graduate School and the State of São Paulo Research Foundation continue to offer faculty members opportunities to form research partnerships. The budget limit on each application has now risen to $20,000 from each party in the São Paulo Researchers in International Collaboration program, known as SPRINT.

According to the Graduate School, the program’s overarching goal is to encourage research projects that grow into larger efforts that will attract funding from the State of São Paulo Research Foundation and the U.S. federal government. The foundation and the Graduate School provide seed funding for their respective teams.

The University’s first SPRINT awardee is Inna Sokolova, a professor and vice chair of research in the Department of Biological Sciences. She will manage a $10,000 research budget and partner with São Paulo researcher Fernando Ribeiro Gomes of the Instituto de Biociências at the University of São Paulo. He will manage a separate $10,000 for their joint project to research the effects of extreme seasonality on metabolism and immunity of amphibians in a tropical semi-arid zone.

“The rising level of research funding in São Paulo has allowed their scientists to focus on important problems rather than being overwhelmed with finding financial resources for their studies,” explained UNC Charlotte professor Daniel Janies. “By taking the lead to organize these funding programs, UNC Charlotte’s Graduate School is opening doors for much broader collaborations between our faculty and their counterparts in the state of São Paulo.”
FOOD LION HELPS ESTABLISH NINER STUDENT PANTRY

Late last year, UNC Charlotte opened the Niner Student Pantry, an on-campus food bank for students experiencing economic hardship. A recent report by Feeding America found that approximately 10 percent of food bank clients are college students. To combat this, many universities are addressing the issue directly. Nationally, more than 100 campus food pantries exist, with UNC Chapel Hill, N.C. State, UNC Greensboro and N.C. Central being the latest within the UNC system. All items were generously donated through the Food Lion Feeds program.

1 in 4
Women in the United States will be a victim of domestic violence at some point in her life

It’s estimated that
1.6 percent of adult North Carolinians are victims of domestic violence every year

Domestic violence costs North Carolina approximately $307,856,298 every year

PROFESSORS QUANTIFY HARD COSTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN N.C.

The statistics are startling: one in four women in the United States will be a victim of domestic violence at some point in her life. On average, three women are killed by a current or former intimate partner every day. While the emotional devastation of domestic violence on victims and their families is immense, a new study by researchers at UNC Charlotte attempts to quantify the hard costs.

The research, featured in the Charlotte Observer, reveals a staggering $307.8 million annual price tag for domestic violence in North Carolina.

“Domestic violence places a significant economic burden on individual victims and society. Unfortunately, current published data on the economic impact of domestic violence are limited, dated and often fail to reflect the full range of costs. The data also provide no local estimates on the cost of domestic violence to North Carolina residents,” said Jennifer Troyer, professor of economics in the Belk College of Business. She co-chaired the study with Stephen Billings, associate professor of economics in the Belk College.

The professors partnered with the eNOugh Campaign, a program of the Jamie Kimble Foundation for Courage, to estimate the annual economic impact of domestic violence in North Carolina.

Analyzing information from government surveys, government data and academic studies, the researchers estimate that 157,193 adult North Carolinians (1.6 percent) are victims of domestic violence every year. Domestic violence costs North Carolina approximately $307,856,298 ($32.26 per resident) every year. The results do not include the unreported costs of social services and costs related to children, which would drive the number much higher, the researchers said.

“This research matters because of the prevalence of domestic violence across socio-economic groups as well as geographical areas and the lack of quantification of this issue,” Billings said. “Our recommendations are to formalize a system for better tracking of domestic violence at the local level through 911 calls and/or the domestic violence hotline so that we can track and reduce the incidents.”

Jill Dinwiddie, a board member of the Jamie Kimble Foundation for Courage and co-creator of the eNOugh Campaign to end domestic violence in North Carolina, said the economic study plays an important role.

The foundation sought “numbers around the real economic impact of domestic violence in North Carolina and to alert taxpayers, employers and health care professionals about the real dollars being spent on this public health issue,” Dinwiddie said. “We want the public to know how important it is to take steps to change the culture of abuse. Addressing this problem on the front end is essential, and the only way to convince public and private funders of this is to make public what is currently being spent.”

Underwritten by the Wells Fargo Foundation, this first report of its kind in North Carolina was published last October during National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.
By Paul Nowell

The prestigious Levine Scholars Program will continue to fund exceptional student-leaders from across the country through 2024 following a gift of nearly $13 million from Leon and Sandra Levine through their foundation.

The gift also expands the program, begun by the couple with a $5 million commitment in 2009.

University leaders announced the extension of the merit scholarship program Oct. 29 at a ceremony at the UNC Charlotte Student Union. Along with the Levines, Chancellor Philip L. Dubois, program administrators, current and former Levine Scholars, staff, faculty and friends of the University participated in the event.

Starting in 2016, the program will have up to 20 new recipients annually, up from the current 15 students per year. By 2020, there will be 80 Levine Scholars enrolled at UNC Charlotte.

Established five years ago through a gift from the Leon Levine Foundation, the Levine Scholars Program recruits extraordinary high school students based on scholarship, ethical leadership and civic engagement.

Recipients receive a four-year scholarship, which covers tuition, room and board, stipends for four summer experiences and a grant to implement a service project of the scholar’s design. In 2014, the value of the four-year package is estimated at $105,000 per in-state student and $155,000 per out-of-state student.

THE PROGRAM WILL HAVE UP TO 20 NEW RECIPIENTS ANNUALLY, UP FROM THE CURRENT 15 STUDENTS PER YEAR.

HALL HONORS LEVINES

To recognize the donors, a new 425-bed residence hall prominently located near the University’s main entrance will be named Sandra and Leon Levine Hall. The building also will house the administrative offices for the Levine Scholars Program and the University’s Honors College.

Construction is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2015, with a projected completion date of summer 2016.

Housing both freshmen and upperclassmen, Levine Hall will feature suites and apartment-style rooms. The building’s apartments are designated primarily for students in the Levine and Honors College programs.

Offices for both programs will include student work/study areas, faculty workstations and private one-on-one spaces. Levine Hall will contain seminar spaces that can be combined for large functions and hotel space for visiting faculty or lecturers, too.

When combined with the original gift commitment, the Leon Levine Foundation has now dedicated $18 million for the Levine Scholars Program.

“We are proud to share Sandra’s and Leon’s vision of bringing extraordinary students committed to community service to Charlotte,” said Chancellor Dubois. “The Levines’ generosity, as expressed in the
Levine Scholars Program, has had a clear and immediate impact on our campus and will pay, through the achievements of our graduates, important dividends to our city and region for years to come. This new commitment helps us to sustain and expand their legacy.

‘INCREDIBLE THINGS’
“We now have seen the first class of Levine Scholars move through the UNC Charlotte curriculum through graduation, and others are following in their footsteps,” he continued. “These students have done incredible things, both academically on our campus and out in the greater community.”

Leon Levine is the founder of Matthews, N.C.-based Family Dollar Stores Inc. He and his wife, Sandra, are involved in many civic and charitable causes through their foundation.

When the program launched, the couple’s original donation was among the largest individual gift commitments in UNC Charlotte history. At the time, Dubois said, “The Levine Scholars Program will prove to be transformational for UNC Charlotte.”

His prediction is coming true.

The inaugural Levine Scholars used their grants to undertake service projects that range from urban farming and artistic installations to child advocacy and more. The scholars attest to the fact that they were given opportunities to expand their educational horizons because of their participation in the scholarship program.

MEET THREE SCHOLARS
Recent graduate Jasmine Patterson used her grant to fund a handcycle for the Adaptive Sports and Adventure Program (ASAP). Powered by a rider’s arms, handcycles are specialized vehicles that can cost up to $6,500.

A track and field athlete, Patterson volunteered with the not-for-profit organization, which is supported by the Carolinas HealthCare System’s Carolinas Rehabilitation practice. ASAP provides opportunities for individuals with physical challenges to participate in a variety of sports and recreational pursuits, including handcycling, rugby, water and snow skiing, tennis, golf, power soccer and kayaking. Patterson is now pursuing a doctorate in audiology at UNC Chapel Hill.

Recent graduates and Levine Scholars Caitlin Vaverek and Celia Karp were honored as Fulbright U.S. Student Program recipients.

Vaverek received a Fulbright Teaching Assistant Fellowship to Nepal for the 2014-15 academic year. The Florida native’s goal is to pursue graduate studies in international development or public policy with a concentration in nonprofit management.

Karp received a Fulbright U.S. Student Academic Award for Research. It will fund her studies in Quito, Ecuador, where she will research “how health communication affects women’s perspectives on sexual and reproductive health, impacts their utilization of maternal health programs and contributes to Ecuador’s high maternal mortality rate,” she said.

Such pursuits inspired the Levines to expand the program. “We could not have envisioned the heights we have seen these fine young students in the Levine Scholars Program reach in the first five years,” Leon Levine said. “They have accomplished great academic achievements, which we fully expected to see.

“However, we have been captivated by their engagement with our community and the ideas they have brought forth in their service projects,” he continues. “It promises great things for the future, both at the University and in the region at large.”

Paul Nowell is media relations manager in the Office of Public Relations.
Engineering Innovation

Students gain real-world experience, jobs through Senior Design Program

By Paul Nowell and Mike Hermann

Each year UNC Charlotte’s William States Lee College of Engineering matches seniors with companies to work on innovative engineering design projects. Throughout the years, the projects have ranged from constructing a floating desalination rig powered by waves to designing the support structure for a museum display of the 120-foot, 80,000-pound Airbus A320, known as “The Miracle on the Hudson.”

And that’s just for starters.

Since its inception in 2006, the Senior Design Program has had a major impact on the students and industries involved. The program currently has about 45 projects that start in the fall and another 30 that start in the spring. They include ones sponsored by both industry and the University.

“This capstone experience gives our students the rare opportunity to use everything they’ve learned from all of their courses and labs in a real-world setting,” said Bob Johnson, dean of the Lee College. “That environment creates an industry experience that lets them hit the ground running when they enter the workforce.”

Johnson said the college has built its four-year curriculum on a foundation of teaching hands-on engineering. The senior design program is a cornerstone of that applied engineering student experience that sets it apart from many engineering programs.

“The recognition of the success of the program is shown in the number of regional engineering firms who participate in the program by providing their talented engineering expertise, as well as their financial resources,” Johnson said. “They come to the program to sponsor a project, and then they come back, again and again. It’s a win-win program for them and us.”

“When I see what the students are able to accomplish, it is really amazing,” said Terry Jordan, director of the college’s Industrial Solutions Lab, which runs the Senior Design Program. “The reason for the program is to provide the students with...”
real-world engineering experience to better prepare them for the work force.”

According to Jordan, the program pays dividends across the board.

“The benefits to students include learning what it’s like to work for a real company and getting to network with engineering professionals as they look for jobs,” he said. “The benefits for companies is they get to be involved in the development of future employees; they get the benefits of collaborations with students and our faculty; they get the creative design of a product at low cost; and they get corporate name recognition on campus.”

**SEEING STUDENTS DEVELOP**

Some companies offer new projects year after year. “I think what keeps bringing them back is they enjoy seeing the students develop, and they are then able to hire some good engineers,” Jordan said.

Not all of the projects go into production in their full form, but sponsoring companies often use components of projects. “A lot of industry projects get implemented in one way or another within a couple of years,” Jordan said.

One or two projects a year will even become spinoff companies. In 2014, Red Wire Login went into business to develop its electronic, integrated product that can operate all electronic devices in a home.

Also going into business in 2014 was the “SOROS” wave-energy conversion team. It designed an ocean platform using wave energy to produce and store compressed air that drives a reverse-osmosis unit for seawater desalination.

In designing the support structure for “The Miracle on the Hudson,” the airliner that went down in the Hudson River in January 2009 with no one drowning, the students got a taste of being part of something historic and learned a lot as well. They had to go far beyond just physically supporting the U.S. Airways plane. The students had to display it to look like it did when it landed in the river, which means it had to be 5 degrees nose up and unsupported by its own landing gear.

Another key requirement of the support design was it couldn’t be too visually obtrusive. The team developed a final design that uses three supports, two smaller ones at the nose and tail and a larger one in the middle of the plane that extends out to the wings. The A320 “Miracle on the Hudson” is now on display at Charlotte’s Carolinas Aviation Museum.

**DEMONSTRATING SKILLS**

Participating in the program offers students an opportunity to demonstrate their engineering skills and to collaborate with professionals at companies that potentially could recruit them in the near future.

Eric Hoefler graduated in 2013 with a degree in mechanical engineering technology. At UNC Charlotte, he had an internship with Highland Industries and told company officials about the Senior Design Program, convincing them to sponsor a project, which was to design a special blade to coat fabric during the manufacture of automotive airbags.

Hoefler said he learned many things from the senior design experience, including project development and planning. “Learning to create timelines for the planning and then making sure things got done on time was critical,” he said. “We also learned a lot about manufacturing processes and process improvement.”

When the project was completed, Highland offered him a job. He is now...
operations manager and facilities engineer at Highland Composites in Statesville, N.C.

“In my current position, I can absolutely see the value of what I learned during the Senior Design Program,” Hoefler said. “Project planning is something I do every day. I also learned that communication skills are vital, both oral and written. As an engineer in industry, I didn’t think there would be a lot of writing, but I was vastly wrong.”

Tom Chervenak was director of new product development for Irwin Tools when he served as a sponsor with the Senior Design Program for five years. Following his retirement in 2012, he began volunteering with the program and is now in his third year as a team mentor.

“For 20 years I was involved in new product development; the work these teams are doing is very similar to that type of work,” he explained. “They get a good flavor for what it’s really like working for a company. Some of the most important things they learn are how to work as a team and the most effective ways to approach a problem.”

The products that teams worked on for him while he was at Irwin Tools included quick-grip clamps, a locking adjustable crescent wrench and linesmen pliers.

“Some of the projects were to improve the mechanical advantage the tools provided,” Chervenak said. “The teams came up with some good ideas that were integrated into future design.”

In 2014, Red Wire Login went into business to develop its electronic integrated assistive living product that can operate all electronic devices in a home. The product began as one of the Senior Design Program projects.

Tasked to design the support structure for “The Miracle on the Hudson,” the students got real-world engineering experience and a taste of being part of something historic. For the project, the senior design team had to go far beyond just physically supporting the airliner. They also had to display it to look like it did when it landed in the river and it couldn’t be too visually obtrusive. The A320 “Miracle on the Hudson” is now on display at Charlotte’s Carolinas Aviation Museum.

‘TOM’S BOOK OF WISDOM’

Asked why he is still involved even though he has retired, he said, “During 45 years as an engineer, I learned a lot about what you should and shouldn’t do. Things like ‘never go to the boss with a problem unless you have some sort of solution to present.’ I feel like it’s my responsibility to pass on some of this knowledge to these young engineers. I give them a list of such items that I call ‘Tom’s Book of Wisdom.’”

Lee Easter became involved in the program three years ago while he was an advisory electrical engineer at AREVA. “The initial draw for me was I had 40 years of experience in the nuclear engineering industry, and I thought I could contribute something,” he said. “Now, I’ve been retired for a year, and I still love doing it. It keeps me sharp.”

A project for AREVA that stands out for him focused on a problem the nuclear industry has been dealing with for years. The problem is detecting when a three-phase power system loses one of its phases. “It’s something that is not obvious when you drop a phase, but it is serious. The students learned a software product called ETAP ElectroMagnetic Transient Program and ran close to 100 scenarios,” he recalled. “They developed graphics that showed the problems and trends.

“The point of the projects is for them to learn a lot,” Easter continued. “This is for the students, and industry gets the benefits of what they’ve learned. What has kept me involved is I enjoy it. I still have something to give and I really enjoy working with the students.”

Former UNC Charlotte electrical engineering professor Ian Ferguson is a big supporter of the Senior Design Program.

“When I was at UNC Charlotte as chair of electrical engineering from 2009-13, I was extremely proud of our many accomplishments in senior design. The projects the teams designed and built were truly remarkable,” he said. “By working on interdisciplinary teams, the students learned the many components that are involved in engineering projects. From successes and setbacks, they learned a tremendous amount about teamwork.

“In my new position as vice provost and dean of engineering and computing at Missouri Science and Technology,” Ferguson continued, “I’m planning to take much of what I learned from senior design at UNC Charlotte and integrate it into the many strengths of the engineering and computing undergraduate programs here.”

Paul Nowell is media relations manager in the Office of Public Relations. Mike Hermann is director of communications for the William States Lee College of Engineering.
Will Leach had no compelling need to move on from his job as principal at Butler High School, where during his tenure significant progress was made in student performance and other key academic measures.

That is, until an entirely new position opened up on the campus of UNC Charlotte, where Leach had earned his master’s degree in school administration in 2000. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools was advertising for the job of principal of a new early college high school on the UNC Charlotte campus, with plans to open in fall 2014. Operating as a district-wide “magnet” school, the new facility would focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education, with an emphasis on energy.

“When I found out about the new job, the first thing I did was do some research on the early college concept. I decided to apply for it because it meant being on the cutting edge of public education,” Leach said during an interview in his office in the school. “It also meant coming back to UNC Charlotte.”

The first of its kind for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the Charlotte Engineering Early College began classes on Aug. 25, 2014, with an inaugural class of 100 ninth-graders from across Mecklenburg County. The students will spend three years on high school courses followed by two more years of college course work at no charge. Program leaders envision the school as a blueprint for the future of STEM education in the region, state and perhaps the nation.

For Leach, it was an entirely new challenge. “I went from being a manager of a large staff of faculty to becoming someone who has the chance to know a lot about each student,” he said. “I know every student by name, and my staff and I have a good handle on their progress and their needs.”

To be ready to open for the 2014 academic year, Leach worked closely with Michele Howard, former dean of students at UNC Charlotte and the director of the Early College Program. They were directly involved in the selection of the faculty and staff. Leach also got to know the parents of his students, mingling with them at several orientation sessions prior to the opening.

“It’s been a lot of work, but it’s been good work,” he said. “We have a lot of control over how we plan our curriculum and how we implement it. To be candid, we are still defining just what success is in this kind of learning environment. I’ve been preaching that to my staff from the beginning, and more than once I have asked them, ‘Are you comfortable with the fact that you are building this ship while it is still flying?’”

While there have been challenges in the first few months of the new high school, Leach remains unfazed and poised. He gives a lot of credit to his professors at UNC Charlotte, who prepared him for his career. “When I was getting my master’s, I participated in a principal fellows program that gave me a lot of theoretical and practical training,” he said. “I also spent a year in an internship position, working in a public school. From there, I went on to become assistant principal at Carmel Middle School. My first job as principal was at Alexander Graham Middle, followed by four years as the principal at Butler.”

And he’s open-minded enough to know he is still being schooled. “I have the opportunity to see a very different side of education,” he said. “It’s been a real eye opener from my vantage point to see what I need to do to collaborate. How do I give feedback, and how do I get feedback? It takes a lot of interpersonal skills, and this is something we want to include in the curriculum. In 10 or 15 years, we hope many of them (the students) are successful engineers. But they will need to know how to interact with each other in the real world.”

As for returning to UNC Charlotte, Leach said he is constantly amazed to see all the changes on campus since he was a graduate student. “I feel a lot more school spirit than I did when I was here in the late 1990s,” he said. “I don’t know if it’s only because of the new football team, but I see a lot of improvement. I’m not sure the average Charlotte resident knows what a quality institution they have in this University.”

Paul Nowell is media relations manager in the Office of Public Relations.

www.UNCC.edu
Pop music plays over the stereo as young dancers stretch on the studio floor. Holiday lights flash around the mirror of the darkened studio. Instructor Dedrick Perkins has turned off the lights while his students stretch in preparation for their jazz class at his Concord, N.C.-based D3DanceStudio.

A 21-year-old dance major at UNC Charlotte, Perkins opened the dance studio last spring with business partner Keyon Baker, 29, a Winthrop University graduate and operational risk manager at Wells Fargo. Their act of artistic entrepreneurship defies conventional wisdom: “workforce development” advocates rarely consider the arts to be a practical career choice. And as a college student, an African-American and a male, Perkins definitely breaks the mold of the typical dance studio owner — white, female and middle-aged.

Perkins, a Charlotte native, had no interest in the arts until his junior year in high school, when he participated in a hip-hop dance class at the studio where his little sister studied. His senior year, he took dance classes at Charlotte’s Garinger High School. Enrolling at UNC Charlotte, he began teaching at two dance studios, one in Concord and one in Matthews.
UNC Charlotte student Dedrick Perkins (right) operates a dance studio with business partner Keyon Baker, a risk manager for a financial services company.

It was then that he began dreaming of his own studio. “I realized, I valued the teaching aspect a lot more than performing,” he said.

Perkins met Baker his sophomore year in college and decided they would be a good business pair, with Baker overseeing operations and Perkins in charge of artistic development. They created a business plan, but with Perkins still in school, had no immediate plans to launch the business. But one day last spring, Perkins saw a space for lease and contacted the owner.

“IT ALL FELL TOGETHER”

The location and layout were perfect, and the owner was eager for a tenant. Perkins had been saving money from his teaching; Baker also had capital to contribute. The two took their chance. “It all fell together,” said Perkins. “I didn’t know if I would have the opportunity again within five years, so I took it.” They opened the studio in April 2014.

Perkins and Baker were prepared financially to survive the first year with only one student, but several students followed Perkins from other studios to D3. Realizing that there was no dance summer camp in Concord, they quickly launched one. They now have 15 students enrolled at the studio and have hired two teachers, in addition to Perkins.

The past nine months have been a learning experience. While balancing both studying and teaching, Perkins has had to handle issues like broken toilets in the girls bathroom and a leaking roof after heavy rain. “It’s a tedious process, but I love it,” he said, referring to all the practical problems owning a studio brings.

Perkins believes the dance curriculum at UNC Charlotte has prepared him for this new role. His choreography training not only allows him to choreograph the dances his students perform in recitals and competition but also to guide them to create their own dances. He credits his ballet pedagogy teacher and mentor, Associate Professor of Dance Delia Neil, with teaching him how to communicate clearly with his students, in tone and body language.

The students’ “responses changed when I changed my methods because of that class,” he observed. “It helped me enhance and adjust my way of teaching.”

WRITING A KEY ELEMENT

His dance composition and history courses have helped his writing improve — a key element, Perkins noted, in establishing professional credibility as he writes grants, creates his website and markets his studio. “Everything I have learned has prepared me for where I am and am going to be,” he said.

Neil said Perkins has a great approach with kids: “He is so affable and endearing that I think the students will adore him.” D3 student Bekah O’Reilly said Perkins “makes me feel comfortable to make mistakes.” Her stepsister, Andrea Martinez, agreed and added, “He’ll let you keep trying.” Perkins demands excellence and proper dance etiquette but still keeps it fun. “I have a very professional relationship with my kids,” he said, adding that they “view me as a big brother and don’t hesitate to ask questions.”

Perkins graduates in May and can then turn his full attention to D3DanceStudio. He and Baker hope that in the next few years they can hire more full-time teachers and buy the rest of the building complex to create more studio space. Ultimately, they hope to have as many as 300 students.

“One day I would hope that the community will see my community as a valuable place for dance education,” Perkins said, “to see my kids progress in whatever they want to do.”

Larissa Kern graduated from UNC Charlotte in December with a Bachelor of Arts in Dance and a minor in journalism.
Life after High School

Grant funds national center to help students with disabilities prepare for the future
By Phillip Brown

Preparing high school students with disabilities to transition to college or careers requires interagency cooperation and proven strategies. That will be the focus of a new national technical assistance center to be housed at UNC Charlotte’s College of Education.

David Test, professor of special education and child development, is the principal investigator for the project that will receive $12.5 million in grant funding across five years from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs. The center will be a partnership among UNC Charlotte and the University of Oregon, Western Michigan University, the University of Kansas and Maryland-based TransCen Inc., which provides direct services to students with disabilities.

According to Test, the center will work with states, school districts and vocational rehabilitation agencies to implement research-based strategies and interventions to ensure that students with disabilities graduate from high school and transition into postsecondary education or employment.

“We will be working with all 50 states and 10 U.S. territories to develop teacher training and professional development for workers in relevant agencies on proven strategies to achieve better outcomes for high school students who are transitioning into adulthood,” explained Test.

Previously, the U.S. Department of Education funded three separate centers to work with high school students with disabilities. The UNC Charlotte-based center will provide more extensive and targeted assistance to states.

Faculty members and researchers from partner universities will provide all-around transition assessment with regard to academics, as well as to students’ independent living, social and employment skills, said Test.

“Intensively, we’ll work with 15 states who apply for greater assistance. Our goal is to identify specific needs, such as greater interagency collaboration, because some students with disabilities may need multiple adult services to live in the community. So this grant will fund efforts to impact education and training in schools and vocational training to enable students with disabilities to become college or career ready,” Test noted. “In addition, the center will work with state leaders and policymakers to encourage changes to improve student outcomes.”

The center will formally begin in January 2015 and has a descriptive but lengthy name — National Technical Assistance Center on Improving Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students with Disabilities. UNC Charlotte’s College of Education is a recognized leader statewide and nationally in special education and child development. Departmental faculty researchers work with Charlotte-area school systems and agencies on initiatives, such as teacher training to prepare educators to work with students with severe disabilities and strategies to improve reading and math skills among elementary students with disabilities.

In 2001, the college established a doctoral program in special education. To date, more than 50 individuals have completed their Ph.D. from the University and are influencing the field as faculty members or researchers at colleges and universities across the country.

David, Test, stands before the Cato Teaching Discovery Mural on campus. The mural signifies the power of teaching, a power that will be increased for children with disabilities, based on research Test is leading.

UNC Charlotte’s College of Education is a recognized leader statewide and nationally in special education and child development.

Phillip Brown is internal communications manager in the Office of Public Relations.
UNC Charlotte has launched an initiative in classroom design to promote active and collaborative learning and to increase student engagement through hands-on activities and labs.

Two classrooms in the Kennedy Building — ironically, Kennedy is one of the four oldest buildings on campus — have been upfitted with state-of-the-art technology and space design to encourage active learning. The larger classroom, pictured here, seats up to 126 students, and the smaller classroom accommodates 36 students.

The Kennedy collaborative classrooms feature roundtables that seat up to nine students with three laptops. Each table has its own white board and a monitor for projecting the laptops. A station with a smart podium allows faculty members to select any student’s screen to display on all monitors in the room. Professors who teach in the classrooms undergo instructional design training offered through the Active Learning Academy.
The UNC Charlotte Urban Education Collaborative recently organized and convened the two-day International Conference on Urban Education (ICUE) in Montego Bay, Jamaica. Approximately 500 educators attended, and the theme of the conference was “Building and Sustaining Global Partnerships for Learning and Development.”

Chance Lewis, founding executive director of the Urban Education Collaborative and the Carol Grotnes Belk Distinguished Professor of Urban Education, said the conference brought together professors, community leaders, health care professionals and other stakeholders interested in urban education.

“The conference, designed to focus solely on urban education, was the first of its kind, nationally or internationally,” said Lewis. “Internationally, urban education is a priority, and cities around the world share some of the same challenges in educating children in urban environments—lower graduation rates, lack of sufficient funding for urban schools and access to more higher education opportunities, to mention a few. Participants came from all over the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Caribbean and South America to exchange information and find ways to improve urban education.”

Keynote speakers at the ICUE, Pedro Noguera and Gloria Ladson-Billings (fourth and fifth from left), join UNC Charlotte’s Ayana Allen, Ellen McIntyre, Chance Lewis and Stephen Hancock.

The Urban Education Collaborative is one of few such organizations in the nation. Its mission is to be a national model of excellence for partnering with urban schools, community organizations and the business community to improve economic conditions, educational opportunities and quality of life for urban students. A goal is to serve as a hub and repository of empirically based research and other resources to improve urban schools.

The conference featured panel discussions and presentations focused on tackling...
challenges that impede student learning.

In addition, there were workshops about the school-to-prison pipeline, challenges facing black males and females and the role that school counselors can play in helping children and their families access critical services.

Conference attendees included 10 students from West Charlotte High School, who applied and were selected to travel to Jamaica and present their research after a year of attending monthly Saturday sessions organized by the Urban Education Collaborative. Part of their participation involved fundraising to purchase necessary school supplies for schools in Jamaica. The collaborative provided scholarships that enabled the students to attend.

West Charlotte High is located in one of the Queen City’s most challenged urban areas. For many of the students, it was their first opportunity to travel outside of the city and/or on an airplane.

According to an article published in “Diverse: Issues in Higher Education,” the experience of engaging with academics at the conference sparked the students’ interest in attending college and graduate school.

“To be honest, I never ever even thought it was a possibility,” one student said. “But when I look around and see that there are other people who grew up like me and they were able to become successful, I now know that anything is possible.”

UNC Charlotte’s College of Education is one of only 10 universities in the United States that offers a Ph.D. focused on urban education, noted Lewis, who leads the program.

Buffie Stephens is media relations manager in the Office of Public Relations.
Reaching the Science Big Leagues

University makes fast inroads in NSF research fellowships

By Melba Newsome
When Susan Sell joined the UNC Charlotte faculty as associate dean of the Graduate School in 2006, one of her top priorities was to convince both students and faculty that pursuing Graduate Research Fellowship Programs (GRFP) through the National Science Foundation (NSF) was worth the effort.

Although the NSF awarded its first fellowships in 1952, UNC Charlotte applicants had been shut out of the winner’s circle, a fact that perplexed Sell. “I noticed immediately that we had some excellent graduate students and an excellent research faculty, but we hadn’t been competing successfully,” she explained. “I wanted to do what I could to change that.”

Sell began by partnering with faculty who were conducting the kind of research funded by the NSF, making the competition more visible and, most importantly, encouraging graduate students to apply. She and her colleagues put together information sessions and workshops to inform students about the requirements for a successful application. They held “pizza nights” to provide applicants with feedback on their proposed submissions. It didn’t take long for their efforts to pay off.

**FIRST WINNERS IN 2008**

In 2008, the long drought came to an end when Sharonda Johnson LeBlanc and Evie Powell received the University’s first NSF GRFPs for nanoscale science and computing and information systems, respectively.

“One of my professors in the Chemistry Department told me about the fellowship,” recalled LeBlanc. “Otherwise, I wouldn’t have known about it or applied.”

The GRFP competition is fierce but the financial benefits are many. Fellows receive a $32,000 annual stipend for three years within a five-year fellowship period. They also receive a $12,000 cost-of-education allowance — paid to the graduate institution and international research — and professional development opportunities.

“Having the fellowship allowed me to focus on research because I didn’t have the teacher load and didn’t have to worry about funding for most of my graduate education,” said LeBlanc.

In the 62 years of its GRFP, the NSF has awarded 48,000 fellowships in a wide range of disciplines, including engineering, life sciences, economics, social sciences, psychology, mathematical sciences, physics and astronomy, chemistry, geosciences, computer and information science and engineering, STEM education and learning research and materials research. To date, 40 NSF fellows have gone on to become Nobel laureates.

LeBlanc says being a part of such a select group has opened doors for her, particularly in research and academia. And she and Powell seem to have started something of a trend. Since snagging the University’s first NSF GRFP in 2008, 15 additional UNC Charlotte students — 10 graduate and five undergraduate — have followed suit. Based on a five-year average, UNC Charlotte currently ranks fourth in the state in NSF fellows.

Sell estimates that about 10 UNC Charlotte graduate students apply for one of the 2,000 fellowships each year and at least one is successful. “It’s a result of raising the visibility, spotlighting the recipients and convincing the faculty that our students were competitive,” she said.

**REMAINING AT UNC CHARLOTTE**

Given that the fellowship funds can be used to study at any university, it is a testament to the caliber of research and study at UNC Charlotte that all 10 recipients from the graduate school have chosen to remain at the University.

For Meighan Read (‘12), continuing her studies at UNC Charlotte after receiving the NSF fellowship in 2014 was virtually a no-brainer. “The mechanical engineering program with a motorsports concentration is one of a kind,” she said. “Students get the chance to work hands-on building cars for competition from the ground up and using knowledge gained in the classroom. I was encouraged to apply for the NSF GRFP by my academic advisor, Dr. Mesbah Uddin. Without the fellowship, I probably wouldn’t even be in graduate school right now.”

“I knew UNC Charlotte was the right place for my graduate education because of the various partnerships with local businesses, the available resources and the opportunity to live in a growing and thriving city,” said 2014 fellow Alexandra Dunn, who earned her undergraduate degree at Elon University.

Grateful for the support and encouragement they received, past recipients are paying it forward by making themselves available to help other interested students with their applications.

As a result, when the 2015 fellows are announced in April, there is reason to believe that the University’s winning streak will continue.
In its first 10 years, Robinson Hall for the Performing Arts has proven itself to be an important venue to showcase cultural offerings of the University to the campus, as well as to the greater community. Recently, the College of Arts + Architecture held a special celebration to commemorate Robinson Hall’s 10th anniversary.

Named for Russell and Sally Dalton Robinson, the three-story, 118,000-square-foot facility contains classrooms, offices and rehearsal and performance spaces for the departments of Dance, Music and Theatre.

Approximately 900 performances by students and faculty from the college’s...
Robinson Hall has staged approximately 900 student and faculty performances since it opened in 2004.

As part of the 10th anniversary celebration, performances by students from the College of Arts + Architecture were presented. The program included:

- Taiko drumming by the UNC Charlotte Percussion Ensemble under the direction of Lecturer Rick Dior
- Martha Graham’s “Steps in the Street,” staged by Assistant Professor of Dance Kim Jones
- Excerpts from Shakespeare’s “The Merry Wives,” directed by Lecturer Kelly Ryan
- “Flight to Jordan,” performed by the Student Jazz Trio, coached by Assistant Professor of Music Michael Hackett
- “Zapateado,” performed by violinist Idunne Lohne and pianist Austin Philemon, coached by Anne R. Belk Distinguished Professor of Music David Russell
- “It’s Only Love,” choreographed by Associate Professor of Dance E.E. Balcos
- Excerpt from “Spring Awakening,” directed by Theatre Department Chair James Vesce
- “Renaissance Commedia,” directed by Assistant Professor of Theatre Carlos Cruz
- “Pas de Quatre,” staged by Associate Professor of Dance Delia Neil
- “Verduron, Verduronet’o,” performed by the University Chorale under the direction of Associate Professor of Music Randy Haldeman

The University presented benefactors Russell and Sally Dalton Robinson an original, commissioned ceramic sculpture by Janet Williams, associate professor of ceramics, during the anniversary observance.

Phillip Brown is associate editor of UNC CHARLOTTE and internal communications manager in the Office of Public Relations.
Coming Home

Men’s basketball embraces alums, hires Henry Williams

Dressed in a black polo and black slacks, Henry Williams sat toward the end of the bench as the 49ers faced Newberry in a men’s basketball exhibition game to open the 2014-15 season.

Henry Williams: the Charlotte 49ers’ all-time leading scorer, the 1992 Metro Conference Tournament Most Valuable Player, and three-time honorable mention All-America, No. 34 retired jersey. That Henry Williams has returned to the 49ers bench as director of player development.

The hiring of Williams reflects a movement that head coach Alan Major has been cultivating since day one on the job. He doesn’t call this program “his” program. He calls this program “their” program — referring to the former players who have built it and the student-athletes who currently live it.

“Don’t call me and ask if you can come to a practice,” Major says to former players. “That’s like calling your parents and asking permission to come home. This is your home. You don’t need an invitation. You don’t need to ask if you can come home. You’re always welcome.”

Major has made a concerted effort to open his arms and his program to former players. They’ve come to practice, spoken with the team, returned in force to the annual alumni game and, perhaps most importantly, joined him at the alumni barbecue he hosts each offseason.

The event is not an attempt to raise money or support — it’s simply designed to reunite former players, listen to their stories and share their laughter. It’s designed to bring them home. Usually hosted at his home, this year, for the sake of convenience, the dinner was at the University Hilton during Homecoming Weekend.

Cedric Maxwell was there. Byron Dinkins was there. Eddie Basden was there. Henry Williams was there. Each has had his jersey retired and each, as it turns out, represents a different decade of 49ers basketball. Maxwell, famously, led the 49ers to the 1977 Final Four. Dinkins carried the 49ers back to the NCAA Tournament in 1988. Williams
continued the run into the ‘90s. Basden was Conference USA Player of the Year in 2005.

Other eras, teams and highlights abounded that evening as well. More than 50 former players, managers, trainers and support staff were in attendance. From the ’60s to the ’10s, they gathered as one big 49ers family.

There was high-scoring De’Angelo Alexander (’07) and higher-scoring George Jackson (’75). Colorful Robert Earl Blue (’74) and “plain vanilla” Dan Plondke (’88). There was smooth-shooting Jeff West (’89) and high-jumping Dan Banister (’91).

There were guys who played their home games at Halton Arena, Independence Arena and the now demolished Charlotte Coliseum. And there were guys who played their home games in the Mine Shaft Harrisburg Gym and at Garinger High School.

The stories they could tell. The stories they did tell.

For the night or for the weekend, the group was able to get together like they did years ago — be it four years or 40.

The years between now and then faded as the laughter grew.

These 49ers were back in their element.

Just like coach Major was hoping, they were home.

49ERS HOST SECOND, THIRD ROUNDS OF MARCH MADNESS

The 49ers will once again host March Madness games at Time Warner Cable Arena. NCAA men’s basketball second and third rounds will be played in Charlotte March 20-22. Eight teams will visit the city to pursue their dream of reaching the Final Four. Four games will be played Friday, March 20, with two more games on Sunday, March 22. The winners of Sunday’s games will advance to the NCAA Sweet 16.

MEN’S BASKETBALL TEAM PICKED THIRD IN CONFERENCE

Coming off back-to-back winning seasons that include championships at both the 2012 Great Alaska Shootout and the 2013 Puerto Rico Tip-Off, the men’s basketball team has been picked to finish third in Conference USA in 2015. The 49ers return 10 letter-winners and four starters from last year’s team, which went 17-14.

Top returner Pierria Henry was named a preseason all-conference selection and earned a spot on the Bob Cousy Watch List for the 2015 Bob Cousy Collegiate Point Guard of the Year Award. Henry could complete his senior season as the school’s all-time steals and all-time assists leader. Eddie Basden (’05) currently holds the record for most steals in program history, while Keith Williams (’87) holds the mark for most assists. Henry will also join Williams as the only four-year starting point guards in program history.

Joining Henry are returning starters Terrence Williams, Willie Clayton and Mike Thorne. Four newcomers — Florida transfer Braxton Ogbueze, Clemson transfer Bernard Sullivan and true freshmen Torin Dorn and Keyshawn Woods — figure to have a major impact on the 2015 season.

WOMEN CAGERS PURSUE 13TH STRAIGHT POSTSEASON BID

The women’s basketball team is in the hunt for its 13th-straight postseason bid, looking to keep the streak alive as one of only 12 programs nationally to earn a postseason nod in each of the last 12 years. Fourth-year head coach Cara Consuegra has led the 49ers to three straight WNIT appearances, including a trip to the WNIT Sweet 16 in 2013.

In preseason, the 49ers were picked to finish fifth in Conference USA. They return three starters, three seniors and 10 overall letter-winners. The seniors are Ayanna Holmes, Olivia Rankin and Hillary Sigmon.
COREY NAGY FIRST GOLFER TO HAVE JERSEY RETIRED

In a ceremony on Saturday, Nov. 22, during the 49ers football game against Morehead State, Corey Nagy became the first member of the men’s golf program to have his jersey retired.

During his collegiate career, the Golf Coaches Association of America named Nagy an All-American four times and an Academic All-American twice. In the Atlantic 10, Nagy was named to the all-conference team in each of his four seasons and was a two-time individual champion at the league’s year-end tournament. He led the Niners to four consecutive Atlantic 10 team titles.

Charlotte appeared in the NCAA tournament in each of Nagy’s four seasons, including the program’s best-ever finishes. In 2007, he was part of the 49ers’ third-place finish at the NCAA Championship, and in 2008, he led the 49ers to an eighth-place showing.

The Charlotte native still holds the best averages for a single season (70.71) and career (71.97) in program history.

A 2010 graduate with a degree in psychology, Nagy appeared in 18 events on the PGA’s Web.com Tour in 2013. He posted one Top-10 finish and was in the Top 100 on the money list.

LIGHTS COMING TO JERRY RICHARDSON STADIUM

With the 2014 football season complete, the addition of lights is under way at Jerry Richardson Stadium. The project is part of the football program’s shift to Conference USA in 2015, a move that will bring night games to Niner Nation. Lights will allow greater flexibility in working with the league’s television partners to schedule kickoff times.

The squad’s annual spring game, on Saturday, April 18, will be played under the lights at 6 p.m.

ATHLETIC FOUNDATION HOLDS SPRING FUNDRAISERS

The Charlotte 49ers Athletic Foundation will host its annual 49er Club Golf Outing and Great Gold Rush Auction this spring. The golf outing is at Pine Island Country Club Monday, April 20. Cost for a foursome with hole sponsorship is $2,700.

The auction is Saturday, May 30, at Halton Arena. Cost is $100 per person.

For registration or information with either event, call 704-687-4950.

MEN’S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE, JANUARY-MARCH 2015

Home games in bold, Halton Arena, * denotes conference game
All times are Eastern and subject to change

JANUARY

| Thursday | 15  | NORTH TEXAS* | 7 p.m. |
| Saturday | 17  | RICE* | 7 p.m. |
| Thursday | 22  | at University of Alabama at Birmingham | 8 p.m. |
| Saturday | 24  | at Middle Tennessee* | 6 p.m. |
| Thursday | 29  | FLORIDA ATLANTIC* | 7 p.m. |
| Saturday | 31  | Florida International University* | 7 p.m. |

FEBRUARY

| Wednesday | 4  | NORTH CAROLINA A&T | 7 p.m. |
| Saturday | 7  | at Old Dominion* (COX) | 7 p.m. |
| Thursday | 12  | at University of Texas at El Paso | 9 p.m. |
| Saturday | 14  | at University of Texas at San Antonio* | 3 p.m. |
| Thursday | 19  | LOUISIANA TECH* (CBS Sports Network) | 7 p.m. |
| Saturday | 21  | SOUTHERN MISS* (ASN/Antenna TV) 5:30 p.m. |
| Thursday | 26  | at Florida Atlantic* | 6 p.m. |
| Saturday | 28  | at Rice* | 8 p.m. |

MARCH

| Thursday | 5  | Western Kentucky University* | 7 p.m. |
| Saturday | 7  | MARSHALL* | 7 p.m. |
| Wed.-Sat. | 11-14 | Conference USA Tournament Birmingham, Ala. | TBA |

WOMEN’S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE, JANUARY-MARCH 2015

JANUARY

| Sunday | 4  | at Old Dominion* | 2 p.m. |
| Thursday | 15  | at North Texas* | 6 p.m. |
| Saturday | 17  | at Rice* | 3 p.m. |
| Thursday | 22  | University of Alabama at Birmingham* | 7 p.m. |
| Saturday | 24  | Middle Tennessee* (Fox Sports Network) | 7 p.m. |
| Thursday | 29  | at Florida Atlantic* | 6 p.m. |
| Saturday | 31  | Florida International University* | 6 p.m. |

FEBRUARY

| Saturday | 7  | Old Dominion* | 7 p.m. |
| Thursday | 12  | University of Texas at El Paso* | 7 p.m. |
| Saturday | 14  | University of Texas at San Antonio* | 7 p.m. |
| Thursday | 19  | at Louisiana Tech* | 7:30 p.m. |
| Saturday | 21  | at Southern Miss* | 5 p.m. |
| Thursday | 26  | North Texas* | 7 p.m. |
| Saturday | 28  | Rice* | 7 p.m. |

MARCH

| Thursday | 5  | at Western Kentucky University* | 8 p.m. |
| Saturday | 7  | at Marshall* | 1 p.m. |
| Wed.-Sat. | 11-14 | Conference USA Tournament Birmingham, Ala. | TBA |
Many of Charlotte’s top business leaders are actively involved with graduate students at UNC Charlotte – as mentors, guest lecturers and program advisors. Take Smoky Bissell, for example, whose ventures transformed Charlotte into an economic powerhouse and who helped establish our graduate curriculum in real estate. If you’re hoping to take big strides in your career, connecting with business royalty is a great first step.
Congratulations to 49ers Elected to State and Federal Office

UNC Charlotte is proud of its alumni who are serving in public office. Along with Lt Gov. Dan Forest (‘93,’94) who became the first 49er to be elected to statewide office in 2012, the University takes pride in alumni serving in state and federal offices.

Rep. Dean Arp
(‘99 MS, civil engineering)
Anson, Union, Republican

Rep. Bill Brawley
(‘78 BS, accounting)
Mecklenburg, Republican

Rep. Cecil Brockman
(‘06 BA, political science)
Guilford, Democrat

Rep. Tricia Cotham
(‘01 BA, history)
Mecklenburg, Democrat

Rep. Mike Hager
(‘87 BS, mechanical engineering)
Rutherford, Republican
Majority Leader-elect

Rep. Kelly Hastings
(‘09, teaching certificate)
Gaston, Republican

Rep. Jason Saine
(‘95 BA, political science)
Lincoln, Republican

ALUMNI LEGACY PROGRAM
As the University continually evolves, it’s important to honor the individuals who helped build the foundation of this University, and those who continue that legacy. The Alumni Legacy Program is designed to recognize those who make the UNC Charlotte experience part of their family tradition.

Any student who has at least one parent, step-parent or grandparent who attended UNC Charlotte is considered to be a legacy, which is a great point of pride.

The Legacy program helps these very important members of the Niner Nation family stay in touch with the University—and with other legacies—through special programs, events, activities and networking opportunities, as well as rewards families for their continued generational support of UNC Charlotte.

If you’re a proud legacy, we want to know. Join the Green Perks Program and self-identify as a legacy by visiting alumni.uncc.edu/legacy.

Calling all mayors, councilman, commissioners, judges and other elected officials, help recognize UNC Charlotte alumni who are serving in local office. Email Betty Doster, special assistant to the chancellor for constituent relations, at betty.doster@uncc.edu.
1980s

**Toni Kelner ('83)**, writing under the pseudonym Leigh Perry, has published “The Skeleton Takes a Bow,” her 13th mystery novel and the second in her Family Skeleton series. Earlier this year, Kelner released two co-edited anthologies entitled “Games Creatures Play” and “Dead but Not Forgotten.”

**Karen Wallace-Meigs ('87)** has returned to the Advancement Division at UNC Asheville after a two-year absence to focus primarily on writing funding proposals. She has been an award-winning teacher and a nonprofit leader, and she held advancement positions previously at UNC Asheville and the School of Education at UNC Chapel Hill.

1990s

**Jennifer Woodward ('92)** recently was appointed associate vice provost for research operations at the University of Pittsburgh, effective Oct. 1, 2014.

2000s

**Robby Johnston ('03)** recently served on the design awards jury for the Greater Columbia (S.C.) section of the American Institute of Architects, South Carolina chapter. The design awards recognize outstanding achievements in architecture by section members.

2010s

**Dylan McKnight ('13)** was awarded the 2014 Marvin Collins Outstanding Planning Award in the graduate student project category for his Learning Participatory Planning and the Reid Park Vision Plan. McKnight began working on designing the park for his capstone project in June 2013, while earning a master’s degree in urban design and community planning. Since graduating in December 2013, he has continued to work closely with the Reid Park Neighborhood Association.

**Ron Sessoms ('11)** was promoted to associate in the landscape architecture and planning firm Rhodesie and Harwell, where he provides planning and urban design expertise to clients. Sessoms manages a variety of projects ranging from small sites to citywide master plans and corridor studies. He holds a master’s degree in urban design from UNC Charlotte.
Rebecca Whitener shares why giving to the University is a priority

By Melba Newsome

While large gifts from wealthy individuals and foundations receive the bulk of the attention, UNC Charlotte is fortunate to have sustaining support from thousands of small donors.

The 1946 Society recognizes such donors who contribute consistently, and it highlights their importance to the University’s success. There are currently 178 members of the 1946 Society’s Gold Circle, which means those individuals have given consistently for at least 15 years. To date, their collective gifts have totaled more than $31 million.

Gold Circle member Rebecca Whitener (’74) has been a benefactor of UNC Charlotte for decades. She explains how and why she started giving and what motivates her continued generosity.

Q: There are so many charities and worthwhile causes, how did you settle on supporting higher education?
A: I believe lifelong community education should be provided so individuals can learn skills and obtain the knowledge and education necessary to carry out a lifetime of productive work. But it’s more than that to me. If a graduate decides to never use the actual degree, they’re walking away with a tremendous advantage of having learned how to learn.

I think John F. Kennedy summed up the value of education best when he said, “Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.” Or, as someone very wise once said, “If you think education is so expensive, try ignorance.”

Q: You probably get asked this quite a bit, but what’s in it for you to continually contribute to UNC Charlotte?
A: I don’t give for what I get in return but for what I have already received. UNC Charlotte has been an important part of my life for as long as I can remember. I, along with three of my six siblings, received my education here. I earned three degrees and spent 23 years on the staff, where I had the privilege of personally knowing Miss Bonnie Cone and chancellors Colvard, Fretwell, Woodward and Dubois.

My years as a student and then as an employee provided me with the foundation and the relevant work experience necessary to pursue my goals outside these safe walls and move into a career I had dreamed of. Donating is an opportunity to give back and pay it forward for the future of higher education at this place.

I give to UNC Charlotte because I trust the leadership, am grateful for what this University has meant to me and my family, and because I am inspired by those who came before me who made it possible for me.

Q: Being a member of the 1946 Society’s Gold Circle requires 15 years of continuous giving. However, it’s clear you’ve been supporting the University for much longer than that. When and how did you get started?
A: The Development Office doesn’t have reliable records going back this far, but I believe
"My years as a student and then as an employee provided me with the foundation and the relevant work experience necessary to pursue my goals. Donating is an opportunity to give back and pay it forward."

I’ve been giving for close to 40 years. I started just after I completed my first degree in 1974 and went to work here that fall as occupational safety and health director.

I was young and didn’t have a lot of money, but I did what I could because this was a young and growing university with a lot of needs and not a lot of alumni.

Q: Two of your children and their spouses are graduates of UNC Charlotte. Have you convinced them to follow in your footsteps in terms of supporting the University?

A: They are all very charitable and know of my support at UNC Charlotte. I hope to pass that on to them and hope that they will give more as they get older and have more dollars available for charitable causes.

Q: These days, young people tend to leave school with so much debt and may not find well-paying jobs. How do you persuade someone in such circumstances to be philanthropic, particularly to a university?

A: As with any giving, the first thing they need to consider is what they really believe in. If they are wondering how to find dollars for their causes, they should start out with a budgeting process and stick with it. You make that commitment and pay it like a bill. Do whatever fits your budget. Whether it’s monthly, quarterly or a one-time annual gift, all gifts are good.

Melba Newsome is a Charlotte-based writer and frequent contributor to the magazine.
Jammin’

Back in 1952—when this photo was shot at Charlotte College and before rock ‘n’ roll—people might have called this foursome a jazz combo. The snare, piano, stand-up bass and a dashing Gibson electric guitar, all being played by nattily dressed and wholesome looking youth; it looks downright quaint.

Quaint though it may have been, this shot depicts a timeless aspect of the full experience of higher education: extracurricular activities. The ancient Greeks defined happiness as the full use of one’s powers toward excellence. One hopes that in this photograph of bygone days these students were exercising their artistic powers in that admirable way and realizing some measure of joy.
Middle Class Meltdown
Why is it happening and how do we fix it?

By Scott Fitzgerald  |  Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies, Sociology

Economic inequality, both within and between nations, has risen steadily since the early 1970s. While the gap between the haves and the have-nots has at times fueled anger and frustration toward dominant economic and political systems (witness the Occupy movement), awareness is growing that even the vibrancy of the American middle class is now at risk.

Attention has turned to questions of economic inequality and the structure of economic systems, fueled in part by works such as Thomas Piketty’s bestselling “Capital in the 21st Century.” Market economies offer notable strengths, including the ability to generate unprecedented wealth and job opportunities, which, in part, led to the creation of the American middle class. The key question is not whether we should have markets but rather how should the rewards of market activities be distributed?

In the wake of the Great Recession of 2008-09, many observers hoped we might see a new era of shared prosperity. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. While the U.S. economy is slowly recovering, most Americans have not benefited. Indeed, 95 percent of growth since the financial crisis has gone to the wealthiest 1 percent of households, while the bottom 90 percent have become poorer. To understand how this happened, we need to ask questions about markets, influence and political will. At the same time, we should also ask a different set of questions: How should people be rewarded for their work? Who should benefit from economic growth? How can we make the American Dream a reality?

In a nation as diverse and expansive as ours, it can be difficult to find common ground. Regardless of political identification, for many, the American Dream is essentially a dream of becoming solidly middle class — owning a home, holding a steady job and providing educational and other opportunities for our children. This dream has inspired and sustained hundreds of millions of workers through the years. However, many middle-class Americans see a future filled with uncertainty and guided by an unattainable dream.

From the late 1970s until the recent financial crisis, the message from Washington and Wall Street was the U.S. economy was consistently growing stronger, more productive and more efficient. Yet, despite the growth in productivity, most workers’ wages remained stagnant and their consumption was maintained by increasingly available consumer credit. Clearly, for individuals and families, access to credit had many positive effects, including the ability to buy things they needed and wanted. However, at the societal level, the effects were quite different. The use of debt as an instrument for maintaining consumption created an illusion of prosperity that masked important shifts in power and control within society. Workers and families who were living off borrowed money that they promised to repay were in a fundamentally different place than those who were able to pay for current consumption with steadily rising incomes.

The challenges facing the middle class are not easily solved. But because prosperous economies depend on the middle class as consumers, some changes are essential. Entrenched and powerful interests, global economic trends, technological change, long-held cultural beliefs, corporate actions and governmental policies all shape the distribution of rewards in our economy and society. Only by challenging and transforming these fundamental factors can we re-establish the security and stability of the American middle class and reverse its meltdown.

Public discussions of growing economic inequality and indebtedness are important — in part because they raise basic questions about fairness, opportunity and rewards in society. We need to find ways to talk across ideological and party lines and work toward an economic system that links capital accumulation with the financial well-being of the middle class; that invests in families by providing stable jobs, good wages, health care and pensions; and that acknowledges the corrosive effects of extreme inequality.

Editor’s Note: This story initially appeared in the Charlotte Business Journal in late August.
THE 2014-15 TITLES OF MR. AND MISS UNC CHARLOTTE WENT TO RYAN LUCKS AND RAVEN JOHNSON. LUCKS, A SENIOR MAJORING IN ENGLISH WITH A MINOR IN AMERICAN STUDIES, BELIEVES THAT HIS PASSION AND LOVE FOR UNC CHARLOTTE QUALIFIED HIM FOR HIS TITLE. JOHNSON IS A SENIOR MAJORING IN PSYCHOLOGY WITH A MINOR IN WOMEN AND GENDER STUDIES.