

# FORWARD TOGETHER

UNC GREENSBORO  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
2025-2030







## PREFACE

The 22-member Strategic Plan Advisory Committee began work in April 2024 on refreshing the 2017 *Giant Steps* plan. It spent the final weeks of spring 2024 engaged in listening sessions from campus-wide forums, small groups and interested individuals. The committee learned about enrollment trends and the new funding model, reviewed the UNC System's plan and those of other institutions and began generating ideas. Campus leadership provided feedback which informed a campus-wide draft.

The draft was released in September to engage the campus throughout the fall term to help chart our path forward. Feedback was solicited via an online form, email, four all-campus forums, a faculty forum, a staff forum, Staff Senate meeting, Faculty Senate meeting and various unit- and department-level meetings. Feedback was reviewed by the committee and informed this plan.

The plan includes three pillars with an overall target for 2030 and supporting goals. Each goal includes example Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure progress. The KPIs are a mix of required UNC System (in blue), UNCG academic program review metrics (in gold), UNCG data appropriate to the goal and committee aspirations to be measured. The final KPIs will be determined during the implementation process. These goals and KPIs will drive various projects and Initiatives over the next five years to move UNCG forward.







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## | INTRODUCTION

### I. A Participatory Approach

This document outlines a plan for the next five years and beyond. It is ambitious and participatory. Its pillars describe our most important shared commitments in broad terms:

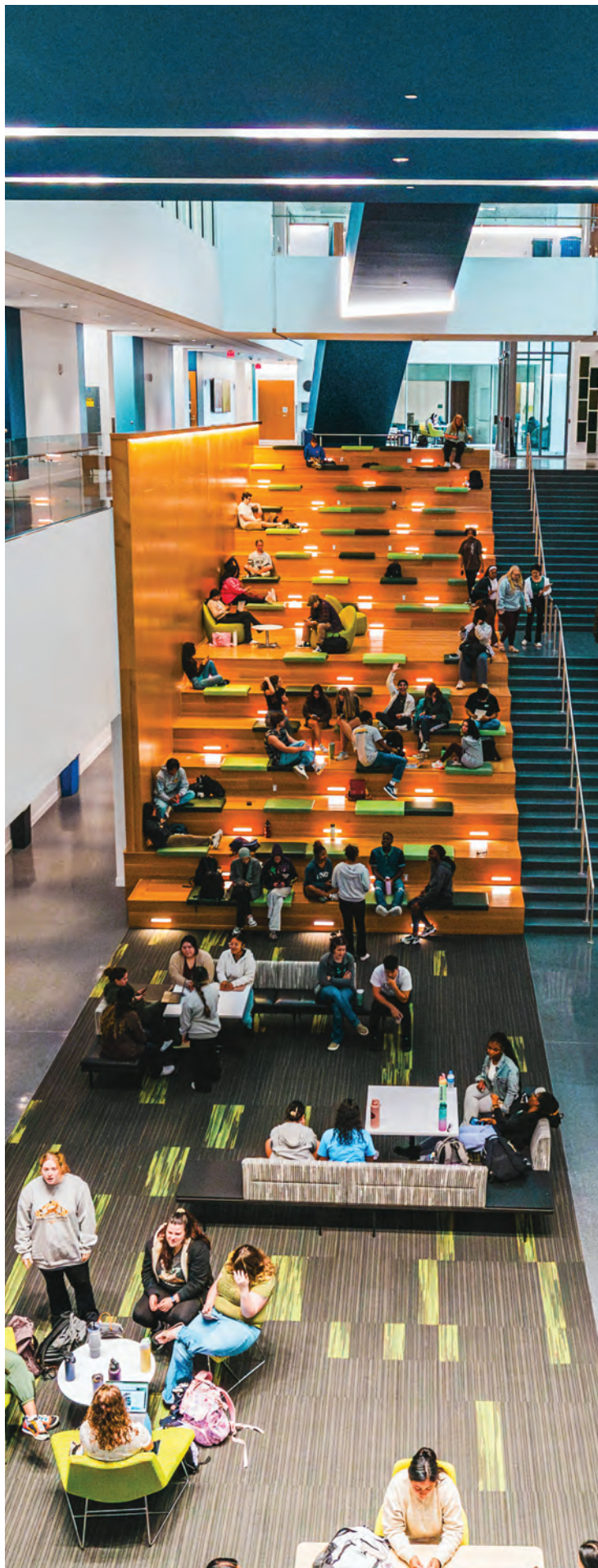
1. **Ensure Success and Upward Mobility for Students from All Backgrounds**
2. **Enhance Research Excellence and Creative Activity to Support Discovery and Societal Impact**
3. **Achieve Operational Excellence and Responsible Stewardship to Support Our Mission**

These pillars point to a new way to understand our mission—one that faces our challenges head on while acknowledging we can and should build on our strengths. The targets and goals under these pillars point to outcomes that will see us do more for our students, more for our community through research and creative activities, and more for our faculty, staff and the institution. Each pillar has one target for 2030 that is supported by goals. The targets are:

1. **Achieve a 45% four-year and 65% six-year graduation rate.**
2. **Achieve R1 Carnegie classification and \$70 million in research expenditures.**
3. **Achieve a strategic reinvestment fund worth 5% of the annual operating budget.**

*Forward Together* is participatory. It was framed through listening sessions in spring 2024, through the contributions of a 22-member working group over the following summer and campus feedback in the fall.

*Forward Together* envisions a shared future for UNCG that fully embraces a need to offer educational programs that resonate with students and amplifies the role of students and faculty in building healthy and vibrant communities.



## II. The Work Ahead

UNCG is the best institution in North Carolina and a leader in the U.S. at accomplishing the most important work universities do, creating economic mobility and social impact through education. We are a public university for the public good.

*Forward Together* affirms UNCG's commitment to the liberal arts, putting students first and connecting them to lives and careers of growth and meaning. We work with corporate and community partners to promote student success and a thriving community.

The pillars, targets and goals of the strategic plan highlight and expand UNCG's distinctive role in educating students from all backgrounds. As North Carolina diversifies, access to education will become even more important. Young people in North Carolina are a much more diverse group than older North Carolinians.

These demographic changes mean business as usual in higher education will not be enough. North Carolina's economic growth depends on providing access to the middle class and beyond for students from backgrounds that are under-represented among college graduates in our state while developing the talents of the next generation.

UNCG is well positioned to support continued economic growth and prosperity for all North Carolinians through increased educational attainment for students from all backgrounds. We equip them with ways of thinking and communicating across lines of difference that are needed to contribute in our increasingly more diverse world.



### ENSURE SUCCESS AND UPWARD MOBILITY FOR STUDENTS FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS

Whether students aspire to greater financial security, a rich intellectual life or lasting community impact, we commit to supporting them fully from matriculation to graduation and beyond. Because this support requires a measurable return on investment and low cost, our first goals are enhancing student wellbeing and achieving the highest rates of degree attainment among our peer universities—regional comprehensive institutions with very diverse student bodies.

UNCG already boasts student success points of pride among public Research II universities nationally, with four- and six-year graduation rates above the mean, even though a larger proportion of our students are from low-income families. We are also significantly less expensive than average, which supports much lower loan debt for our students. We serve more Pell students, charge them less and graduate a higher percentage of undergraduates on time than is the norm for schools like ours. But UNCG can lead the nation among access-focused regional comprehensive universities by holding its costs down, continuing to control student loan debt levels and increasing four-year graduation rates from 39% to 45% on the way to pushing six-year graduation rates from 59% to 65% by 2030.

These goals are ambitious, but they are within our reach. Pillar I specifies these goals, as well as how we support wellbeing during students' time at UNCG and their aspirations after they graduate. Our target for 2030 is a 45% four-year and 65% six-year graduation rate.



## ENSURE RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY TO SUPPORT DISCOVERY AND SOCIETAL IMPACT

All we do is grounded in an expansive idea of research and creative scholarship that leads to discovery, knowledge creation and innovation to transform the world and its people. We recognize that research and creative scholarship can be achieved by a variety of methods, in a variety of contexts and in pursuit of a variety of purposes. It can enhance or revise knowledge, offer new theoretical insights, have an impact on various populations or organizations, or lead to new technologies.

UNCG aspires to be a leading public university that fosters an environment for knowledge creation through discovery, research and creative scholarship. Our university is home to extremely talented researchers, scholars, experts, artists and creators. Nearly 40 UNCG faculty were named among the world's most influential researchers in 2024. These scholars are cited most often by others in their fields and continue to influence discovery and knowledge creation to address societal challenges and transform communities and our world.

We will build on our strength in community-focused scholarship while forging new partnerships with local, regional, national and global organizations and industries to address emerging needs.



We are an engine of discovery and creative work. From the lab bench to the studio and beyond, our faculty make contributions to their disciplines and our communities. This plan aims to maintain and elevate faculty research, discovery and creativity through careful attention to the multiple ways the knowledge-production enterprise is organized and supported, pointing toward new collaborations and better coordination across campus, with industry and in the region. Our target for 2030 is to achieve R1 Carnegie classification and \$70 million in research expenditures.



## ACHIEVE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP TO SUPPORT OUR MISSION

The next five years will be a time of continuing challenges as the national landscape shifts. This is a time of significant political, cultural, demographic and economic change. This plan acknowledges the importance of UNCG retaining and developing its workforce and asks how a university of our size should be resourced, how its operations can be optimally supported and how it can align its financial and human capital in ways that address budget realities while still looking toward future innovations as it pursues its mission.

Financial sustainability must be at the heart of how UNCG's shared and participatory future is charted and realized. The ability to invest in high-performing programs, places where we can compete and be distinctive, requires creating an reinvestment fund. Our target for 2030 is to achieve an strategic reinvestment fund worth 5% of the annual operating budget.



## PILLAR #1: ENSURE SUCCESS AND UPWARD MOBILITY FOR STUDENTS FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS

This pillar answers the question: What do students most need to thrive and contribute their best talents to a larger world? Graduation is an important waypoint on their journey, and we owe it to our students to build academic and psycho-social support structures that lead to excellent graduation rates. The mean six-year graduation rate at regional comprehensive universities (RCUs) for 2022-2023 was 52.5%, compared to 58% for UNCG. Some selective RCUs, however, have graduation rates at 70% or above. Among access-focused institutions like ours, a few have 65% graduation rates—a number that represents best-in-class performance.

**Pillar #1 Target 2030:** UNCG can lead among access-focused regional comprehensives by holding its costs down, continuing to control student loan debt levels and increasing four-year graduation rates to 45% on the way to pushing six-year graduation rates to 65%.

### Goal 1.1: Enhance Student Well-Being

Students need an environment that promotes a sense of belonging in physical and virtual spaces to thrive on our campus. We will invest in programs that demonstrate a correlation between retention and student well-being.

- **Example KPIs:** First-year retention rate. Four- and six-year graduation rates. Well-being survey data. iBelong data.

### Goal 1.2: Foster Best-In-Class Undergraduate Degree Attainment for Students from All Backgrounds

Through innovative curricular changes, attention to student financial needs and integration between curriculum and experiential learning, UNCG will focus on developing access for a more expansive range of students, thereby achieving graduation rates that equal or surpass those of our peers while keeping costs down for students.

- **Example KPIs:** First-year retention. Four- and six-year graduation rates. Average credits earned per year. First-time student debt at graduation. Transfer student debt at graduation. Undergraduate degree efficiency. Education expenses per degree.

### Goal 1.3: Prepare Students for Meaningful Careers and Lives

The workforce of tomorrow requires deep knowledge, critical thinking and flexibility. Our programs amplify the contributions our students make to communities and organizations by developing their skills. Our programs will root workforce skills in liberal arts education and demonstrate the connection between a broad education and post-graduation success.

- **Example KPIs:** Post graduation career outcomes. Completer earnings (return on investment). Career readiness metrics. Graduate and professional program enrollment.

## PILLAR #2: ENHANCE RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY TO SUPPORT DISCOVERY AND SOCIETAL IMPACT

As teacher-scholars, UNCG faculty recognize the role of innovative research, creative scholarship and innovation on high-quality teaching that bolsters student success and prepares students for competitive careers. As we strive to become a leading impactful university, we will bolster the quality and transformative nature of the research, creative scholarship and innovation coming from UNCG. We are committed to ensuring growth of research, creative scholarship and innovation that engage our students, while benefiting society, and our world.

**Pillar #2 Target 2030:** Achieve R1 Carnegie classification and \$70 million research expenditures.

### Goal 2.1: Maintain and Elevate Overall Research Excellence

Discovery and knowledge creation are foundational to student success, social impact and our objective of transforming the world. UNCG is committed to maintaining and elevating research excellence across all disciplines and methodologies through producing high-impact research and creative scholarship, increasing and diversifying funding sources to support the work and building new areas that support emerging local and national initiatives. We will ensure that our research infrastructure, resources and support systems are aligned with the highest standards of academic inquiry and innovation.

- **Example KPIs:** Maintain and increase the number of high-impact research publications and productions. Increase and diversify sources of external research funding to support impactful projects. Elevate recognition of UNCG researchers through national and international awards.

### Goal 2.2: Foster Collaborative Research and Scholarship

Collaborative research and creative scholarship bring together the talents of faculty to achieve shared outcomes and address pertinent problems that cannot be solved through an individual's disciplinary field. We can accomplish more together if we leverage our existing resources and capitalize on our strong teacher-scholar model to position faculty and research scholars for success in conducting research and scholarship, to effectively engage in national- and community-based research and innovation through the development of collaborative research teams.







- **Example KPIs:** External grants for collaborative research and interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary publications and productions. Increase grants to support scholarship and advance project activity.

### Goal 2.3: Address Community and Industry Priorities through the Arts, Discovery, Research and Creative Scholarship

We recognize that collaboratively produced knowledge grounds our work and contributes to our mission. By partnering with industries and communities, UNCG will support and amplify the relevance and impact of teaching, research, scholarly and creative activities to on national, local and global communities. We will strengthen public-private partnerships to respond to the needs of industry in North Carolina and address national priorities. We will align research centers and institutes with national needs and funding priorities and convene programs that raise research, creative scholarship and innovation visibility at UNCG that attracts the community and showcases our current and emerging strengths.

- **Example KPIs:** Number of partnerships established with organizations and companies. Projects established and their overall impact. Number and percentage of students participating in research.

### Goal 2.4: Modernize Graduate Education

Graduate education is the foundation of research, creative scholarship and innovation for the future. UNCG is committed to supporting the long-term vibrancy and sustainability of its graduate offerings by providing graduate assistantship opportunities and support and by consistently assessing our program mix, modifying curricula and increasing flexibility to meet student demands. Diversifying funding sources to support graduate research assistantships through grants, fellowships and scholarships is key. We must offer the right programs, resourced appropriately, if our graduate students and research programs are to flourish.

- **Example KPIs:** Attract funding to support graduate research assistantships. Increase graduate assistant stipends. Increase graduate student graduation rates. Decrease time to degree. Implement curricular changes that are reflective of current and emerging workplace needs.



### PILLAR #3: ACHIEVE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP TO SUPPORT OUR MISSION

Operational excellence and responsible stewardship are crucial to supporting students and fostering social impact. By nourishing a culture of continuous improvement, we will enhance our university's reputation, strengthen our financial sustainability, optimize research infrastructure and empower our faculty and staff to drive our mission.

**Pillar #3 Target 2030:** Our target for 2030 is to achieve a strategic reinvestment fund worth 5% of the annual operating budget.



### Goal 3.1: Strengthen Resource Management and Financial Sustainability

Maximize efficiency and effectiveness of financial, physical and operational resources. Enhance and diversify revenue generation. Strengthen alumni and donor engagement and giving.

- **Example KPIs:** Increased revenue. Educational-related expenses. Alumni engagement. Campaign success. Total dollars raised. Number of new revenue streams. Ratio of operational revenue to operational expenses.

### Goal 3.2: Adapt to Achieve Sustainable Operations

To sustain the productivity of UNCG's workforce and the effectiveness of the UNCG's operations, we will work toward processes that are efficient and standardized, allocating work in a sustainable manner that is optimized while aligning with applicable policies and available funding. We will strive to ensure that the work performed by our faculty and staff is supportive of UNCG's mission and recognized, acknowledged and managed with care and consideration for the sustained success of the university.

- **Example KPIs:** Increased scholarly production per full-time equivalent faculty. Increased system funding model performance rating. Increased research dollars awarded. Increased corporate partnership dollars. Faculty and staff headcount aligned with student enrollment and benchmarked against universities similar to UNCG. Reduction in steps and days needed to complete a process. Elimination of outdated practices that are no longer needed or add value.

### Goal 3.3: Retain and Empower a Productive and Talented Faculty and Staff

Our students are at the heart of everything we do, and it is the dedication, innovation and passion of our faculty and staff that drive student success, empowering them to reach their fullest potential. We will continue to develop and implement initiatives and programs to retain talented faculty and staff, addressing employee satisfaction, including offering development programs so employees can maximize their potential. We will examine institutional support for mentoring and participate in succession planning, enhance infrastructure that supports research and scholarship and improve administrative processes.







- **Example KPIs:** Faculty and staff turnover. Number of employees completing leadership development programs. Core facilities that make our university distinct and enable research excellence. Shortened time to approval for Institutional Review Board applications.

### Goal 3.4: Elevate the University Brand and Reputation

We will amplify the excellent work of faculty, staff and students, aligning reputation with performance. We will demonstrate to diverse audiences (prospective students, parents, community partners and legislators) the value and social impact of our research, creative activities and, especially, the educational opportunities we offer uniquely well for students from all backgrounds.

- **Example KPIs:** Increased brand identification. Increased yield of admitted students. Increased corporate partnerships. Enrollment Management survey results.

### Goal 3.5: Support a Stabilized and Data-informed Enrollment Model

Use sound strategies to drive stable enrollment outcomes, including alignment of need-based scholarship resources with enrollment needs, innovation on supplemental admissions pipelines to account for a changing higher education landscape and campus-wide engagement in undergraduate and graduate recruitment efforts.

- **Example KPIs:** Total enrollment. Additional enrollment pipelines. Improvements in met vs. unmet scholarship need.



## STRATEGIC PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- **Wade Maki**, Chancellor's Fellow for Strategic Planning and Principal Lecturer of Philosophy, College of Arts and Sciences (chair)
- **Cathy Akens**, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
- **Juliette Bianco**, Associate Vice Chancellor for Museums and Creative Practice and Anne and Ben Cone Memorial Endowed Director, Weatherspoon Art Museum
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- **Scott Milman**, Associate Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration
- **Sherine Obare**, Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement
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- **Audrey Snyder**, Associate Dean for Community Engagement and Academic Partnerships and Professor, School of Nursing
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- **Andrew Hamilton**, Dean of Undergraduate Studies (ex-officio)

