



Executive Summary

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is a major research university with a strong and dynamic roster of activities for learning and advancement, not only on campus but also throughout the state and indeed around the world. While students at UNC-Chapel Hill have traditionally been educated in the various academic disciplines within departments, Carolina has long recognized the value of experiential learning as well as crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries. Some of today's foremost educational challenges -- such as helping students learn approaches to solving complex problems and develop talents for lifelong learning -- have interdisciplinary and experiential dimensions. Some of these needs are met by offering interdisciplinary majors, programs, and courses, of which the University already provides many vibrant options. Others are provided by scholarly activities facilitated by units such as the Office of Undergraduate Research and the Study Abroad Office. Addressing them more fully requires marshalling the resources of the entire University and the community in which it is situated.

During the past three years, we have revised our undergraduate curriculum in part to respond to these challenges. The new General Education Curriculum, to be implemented in fall 2006, includes a series of curricular requirements to ensure that students develop *foundations* (the skills needed to communicate effectively both in English and another language, to apply quantitative reasoning skills in context, and to develop habits that will lead to a healthy life), explore *approaches* (a broad experience with the methods and results of the most widely employed approaches to knowledge), and *make connections* to these foundations and approaches in their programs of study. The ability to make connections also helps students integrate these foundations and approaches in ways that transcend traditional boundaries, as well as to create pathways from the campus to local, national, and worldwide communities.

The curriculum stands at the center of the academic life of the University. So, how can the learning expected inside the classroom (where the curriculum is typically based) connect to what happens outside it? The launch of a new General Education curriculum offers the University an unusually good opportunity to make such connections, and we have thus made this one focus of our Quality Enhancement Plan. **Making Critical Connections** will help the University implement the new curriculum in such a way that research and internationalization become critical components of everything we do.

One critical connection involves the link between the curriculum and one of the major activities in which the faculty and professional staff participate: *research*. Our intellectual community is defined by the fact that faculty are involved in a wide range of undergraduate programs, are committed to training master's and doctoral students, and also are engaged in their own research and scholarly activity. If any of these three elements were to be abandoned, UNC-Chapel Hill would no longer be a comprehensive major research university. Nor would the University contain "communities of learners" where "the shared goals of investigation and discovery bind together the disparate elements to create a sense of wholeness" (*The Boyer Commission Report on Educating Undergraduates*, p. 9).

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is working to make research, mentored scholarship, and creative performance even more distinctive features of a Carolina

undergraduate education. The provision of “high quality undergraduate instruction to *students within a community engaged in original inquiry and creative expression*” (emphasis added) has been an explicit part of the University’s mission statement since 1994.

At times, the emphasis on research at the University has threatened to separate faculty from undergraduate students and graduate from undergraduate education, to the detriment of all. **Making Critical Connections** offers us the opportunity to encourage our undergraduate students to be full participants in the intellectual life of our university and to engage in the research culture that surrounds them on our campus. Students who have experienced inquiry and discovery will be well prepared to address future unsolved problems and to assume important roles as enlightened citizens and leaders in our increasingly interconnected world.

Another way to help students make critical connections is by further internationalizing the undergraduate experience at Carolina. Global citizenship requires an understanding of the cultural interaction between nations and the mutual impact felt around the world by such exchanges. We define internationalization “as the process of integrating an intercultural and global dimension into the purpose and function of education at UNC-Chapel Hill in a manner consistent with both our core values as a public institution and the furtherance of a sense of global citizenship among our intramural and extramural constituents.” Thus, another critical connection is that from the curriculum to internationalization.

In order to allow more students to exploit these connections, the following recommendations will be among those pursued:

- In the Curriculum:
 - Establish an innovative scheduling alternative, such as a “Maymester.” This intersession option, which would likely be administered by the University’s well-established Summer School Office, would allow faculty members to spend a concentrated period (three weeks under the current scenario) with a group of undergraduate students, either on- or off-campus. Team taught and interdisciplinary courses will be encouraged.
 - Create a “Connections Center” on campus whose mission would be to foster the ability of faculty and students to make connections between the many opportunities for learning that occur daily throughout the campus and those available in the region, state, nation, and world. The Connections Center would promote a new learning vision that seeks to break down traditional barriers -- between curricular and “co-curricular” education, between research and teaching, between local and global perspectives -- by viewing the entire student experience as a venue for student learning.
- In the Research Area:
 - Establish a series of linked courses across the disciplines to introduce students to unsolved problems, help them understand multiple modes of inquiry, and enable them to conduct original work in newly established “Research Tracks.” We will increase the profile of research and the number of course offerings in which students carry out original research projects through the creation of four new term “Research Professorships,” one in each of the divisions of the College of Arts and Sciences.

- Increase the number of qualified mentors for undergraduate students who wish to engage in research.
- In the International Arena:
 - Improve the infrastructure for international activities, which will in turn increase support for international research and enhance the learning and educational environment for students and faculty.
 - Embed internationalization into the curriculum as deeply as possible as a means of extending global opportunities to members of the Carolina community. To broaden the international presence on campus, the University will increase the number of international faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, and undergraduate students.
 - Encourage undergraduate students to travel and study abroad.

In recent years, the faculty and administration have asked a number of questions about the intellectual environment on campus. What can be done to break down the barriers that too often exist between undergraduate students and graduate and professional school students? How might the departments in Academic Affairs and Health Affairs work together more productively? How can faculty, with their considerable research expertise, find new ways to introduce undergraduates to the delights of discovery and the wonders of new knowledge? How can the scholarly community on our campus more deeply integrate research, scholarship, and creative activities into the undergraduate curriculum? How can we eliminate the walls that so often separate local activities from international programs, thus hindering students from a fuller understanding of “foreign” ideas and cultures?

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill believes that **Making Critical Connections** will go a long way toward answering these questions.