



**Dr. R. Scott Ralls, President  
North Carolina Community Colleges**

**Report to the State Board of Community Colleges  
Alamance Community College, Graham, North Carolina**

**October 17, 2008**

October has been and will continue to be a busy month, but this week may be the busiest of all. The week began with the System-wide Conference in Raleigh and I want to thank and congratulate Dr. Parker, her staff and the conference committee members for an outstanding job. I heard several comments that it was the best conference ever, and everything seemed to go just perfectly. President Keys of Rockingham Community College told me that the quality and scope of the conference program compared favorably to the AACC (American Association of Community Colleges) national conference. Nothing of that magnitude goes that smoothly with a lot of behind the scenes work, and I want to thank Dr. Parker and all the staff for their dedicated efforts.

A highlight of the conference was its venue -- the new Raleigh Convention Center. It's an example of how on several occasions this week, the new has seemed to contrast with the old, or perhaps another way of looking at it is that our remarkable past has been juxtaposed with the important future.

On Tuesday I had the privilege to spend some time at the conference with Raymond Jeffries, who was recognized at the Student Development breakfast. Mr. Jeffries was a well-known leader in our important student services area having worked at the System Office, or the Department of Community Colleges as it was once called. He was beloved for his service to colleges, for visiting every community college in the state each year, and for his role as the father of our student government programs.

Later that day, I had the opportunity to visit Nash Community College to speak at their annual Chamber Expo. State Board member Norma Turnage introduced me and also provided a great advertisement for the important work of community colleges. The extremely well-attended expo clearly indicated the strong business partnerships at Nash, and while there I saw their great recognition of our philosophical pioneer, Dr. Dallas Herring, with his total education quote and likeness highlighted on banners in their hallways. I also briefly participated with machining instructors who were there from around the state working diligently on their Curriculum Improvement Project. The juxtaposition of the past with the future was clearly evident again as instructors in one of our oldest curriculum areas focused on improving training in an area that is now high-tech computer programming.

The juxtaposition with our remarkable past has also clearly been evident in our wonderful visit this week to Alamance Community College. It is unfortunate that Governor Scott was not able to visit with us, but I feel privileged that I had the opportunity to spend several hours with him just a couple of months ago and share stories. It was wonderful to see his family

members and visit the Scott Center here at Alamance Community College. My full name is Robert Scott Ralls, and while I was not named for Governor Scott, I have felt a connection with him since my time as a boy when people sometimes speculated if he was the inspiration for my name.

Governor Scott's remarkable leadership has been an inspiration to me and others throughout the System, and his impact is still very evident in the opportunities we provide to students today. As North Carolina and our college move into another period of significant layoffs and closings, one of our most important programs today is the Human Resources Development program that provides important employability skills training to dislocated workers and disadvantaged citizens. The program started in 1972 as a brainchild of George Autry and MDC and with the leadership of then-Governor Scott, and it is as relevant today as it was in 1972. Now that is true vision.

Finally, our jam-packed week has been capped by hospitality of Alamance Community College for our board retreat and meeting. This campus holds great history for our System as you know, as the first institution in the state opened 50 years ago under the auspices of our forerunner institutions, the Industrial Education Centers. But walking the halls and visiting the labs and classrooms, you not only feel the spirit of our unique heritage but also the exciting pulse of our future in a student-centered institution thriving under the leadership of Dr. Martin Nadelman.

As Dr. Nadelman reminded us earlier, Alamance pioneered decades ago one of the programs that also represents our future. The biotechnology program here was the nation's first two-year degree program in biotechnology.

One thing that clearly joins our past to our future is our unique role in creating success for students and communities in our state by providing hope, opportunity and jobs. The outstanding Sheps Center study of our nursing programs, released at this meeting, highlighted our vital impact on healthcare jobs in North Carolina. As that study indicated, compared to nurses graduating from four-year colleges, our nursing graduates are twice as likely to live in rural communities, three times as likely to serve underserved communities, and 90% of our graduates are employed as nurses in our state within one year. Those are remarkable statistics – statistics of real success and impact.

To have the type of impact on North Carolina's future that we have had in our past requires us to continually review the factors that promote student success as we have done with the Sheps' report. It also requires us to have the resources to be the type of world-class community college system that North Carolina needs today and in this environment more than ever.

North Carolinians need us to play our customary role as North Carolina's "economic cavalry," but as I learned as a boy watching movies, a cavalry needs soldiers and horses if it is to come to anyone's rescue. And you can't be world-class when you pay your instructors at only 79% of the national average, because you can't hope to retain your best people. And you can't pretend to be world class when you can only replace your current stock of technology and equipment every decade.

That is why the focused, multi-year budget approach you approved at this meeting is so important. If we are able to have success in garnering champions to it, it will mean that the

teachers in the nursing programs and the machining instructors no longer see as great a discrepancy in **teaching** their profession as compared to the wages they would make in **doing** their professions. It will also mean that they will be able to educate their students on the type of technology and equipment that they will find when they leave the lab and enter the workforce. Further it will expand the opportunities for students in these critical career areas that provide job opportunities for North Carolinians right now and that meet increasing needs of North Carolina's citizens and businesses.

Bottom line, it will enable our 58 community colleges to create success for North Carolina from Manteo to Murphy and from Burlington to Buxton. As North Carolina's economic cavalry, that has always been our vital role. Yet, even considering the importance of our past, our mission and our vital role are more important today than ever.

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