

President's Report
State Board of Community Colleges
Dr. Scott Ralls, President
NC Community College System

Tuesday afternoon, I was attending President Bill Friday's 90th birthday celebration, and while standing there eating my cake, I was introduced to someone who asked me what it felt like to be "the new darlings". When I looked puzzled, he explained that he was a studious observer of the legislative process and the political scene, and, in his opinion, our successes during the recent session demonstrated we had reached a new plateau, one where our system was finally receiving recognition that we had long deserved.

I'm not sure that I agree with the assessment that we have achieved "darling" status, nor am I sure that is a goal to aspire to, although I guess it sure beats the heck out of the alternative.

However, I would agree that in a difficult budget climate, our investors – the legislators and the Governor – saw us as a solid investment for the future of our state and supported us accordingly. And in my discussions with many of the legislators, I've learned that it is not just the tremendous numbers of citizens we are serving that is prompting their support, but it is the impact we are having and the excellence our colleges are achieving during difficult times that is also undergirding their confidence in our system.

Several times this month, I have seen that impact and commitment to excellence on display -- the kind of excellence that causes the pride to swell up in you. You saw it yesterday, and I'm sure you felt that swelling pride during the Issues Luncheon at the Biotechnology Training and Education Center. There you got a case study of the type of teamwork and effort our colleges display in not only preparing North Carolina's workforce for future jobs, but in providing the environment that encourages companies to create high wage jobs in our state. On Thursday, you saw how effort, innovation, and teamwork by Durham Tech, our System Office team, our BioNetwork and Capstone Center staff, and the North Carolina Department of Commerce all contributed to the effort by Merck to bring jobs to our state. While flying perhaps under the

radar, these efforts of extraordinary teamwork occur on a daily basis and help shape a more economically prosperous North Carolina.

Pride was also what I felt on Monday afternoon when with Dr. Sharon Morrissey, we joined the team from Pitt Community College and welcomed representatives of over twenty community colleges from around the Southeast United States to North Carolina. Under the leadership of Pitt Community College, these colleges, which also include Catawba Valley and Central Piedmont, have been designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to initiate the development and deployment of new health information technology training across a region that stretches from Kentucky to New Mexico. Watching Pitt Community College's Dr. Kay Gooding, so skillfully lead an effort that has such strategic importance to our state, region, and nation, exemplified to me the depth of excellence and remarkable leadership that exists throughout our system.

Finally, pride was what I think we all should have felt this month when we released our college accountability and performance measures. Each year, as you know, the North Carolina Community College System evaluates colleges' performance in eight core areas. Given the unprecedented demands and enrollment growth our colleges have faced since the onset of the recession, perhaps it could have been expected that our performance might have taken a big dip.

We may not have expected that all 58 of our colleges would exceed the System goal of 65 percent or more of our degree students completing their education, transferring to another higher education institution or returning to continue their education, but that is what we found. We may not have expected that all 58 of our colleges would surpass the standard of developmental course completers passing college-level English and math courses, but that is what we found. And we probably would not have expected that all 58 of our colleges would post a 90 percent or higher student satisfaction rating from both student completers and non-completers, but that is also what we found.

In a year in which we have initiated a significant system-wide effort to enhance student success and program completion through our SuccessNC initiative, it is gratifying to know that we are starting with a strong foundation. And given the great priority we are placing on student success as the focus of our strategic planning efforts, we should take this opportunity to again recognize the 11 colleges this year that achieved “Exceptional Institutional Performance” : Asheville-Buncombe Technical College, Blue Ridge Community College, Coastal Carolina Community College, Forsyth Technical Community College, Piedmont Community College, Randolph Community College, Rockingham Community College, Southwestern Community College, Surry Community College, Wayne Community College and Western Piedmont Community College.

The recent experience and challenges of Randolph Community College illustrate to me how exceptional these high levels of college performance should be considered given the overwhelming volume of demands the faculty, staff and administrators have simultaneously faced during this challenging period. Ironically, just before Randolph received notification from us that they were one of our 11 exceptional college performers for the year, the college had been informed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or SACS that they had been placed on warning status for the upcoming year. It seems that when the SACS visitation committee was on campus during the most recent Fall semester, when enrollments across our state spiked by 15%, they noted with concern that Randolph was not following their normal policy of limiting teaching loads to no more than 21 hours. To meet the overwhelming demand and keep from turning students away, several Randolph faculty that semester were teaching as many as eight courses which prompted the SACS warning.

Now personally, this sort of seems to me a little like citing an ambulance for speeding on the way to an accident, particularly given that we have previously noted how our community colleges these past two years have taken on the role as North Carolina’s economic emergency room.

But nevertheless, I think it further positively illustrates the lengths our colleges are going to not only meet student enrollment demands, but also to perform at the levels required to foster student success, even if that may prompt justified concerns regarding workloads. Thank goodness that the General Assembly and Governor responded through the recently passed budget to help us address this urgent need.

And given that student success is what it is ultimately all about, I will end by telling you about two unique student success stories at different places along the educational pipeline, but both owing a part of their success to their opportunities at one of our community colleges, Guilford Tech.

First is the story of Owen Rees who this Spring received a \$50,000 merit scholarship to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology -- you may have heard of MIT, it's a little technical college next to Harvard. An eighteen-year-old homeschooler, Owen spent five semesters at Guilford Technical Community College where he took calculus, chemistry, physics and astronomy. Owen was recently quoted in the newspaper as saying, "They have some good teachers here (at GTCC)."

Guess so. But if you needed more proof, you could turn to, Ryan Kabatchnik, a 2005 graduate of Guilford Tech's Middle College, who, following his transfer to NC State, ranked first in his junior class there. This year, Ryan graduated from State as a Phi Beta Kappa university valedictorian with a perfect GPA and a double major in computer science and economics major, and a minor in accounting.

As Owen said, I guess they do have some good teachers at GTCC, and staff and administrators as well, just as you will also find at our other 57 colleges. And it is that level of exceptional instructional quality, combined with extraordinary effort and dedication, which is prompting the appreciation and respect that our system is garnering today.