

*The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chancellor James Moeser
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THE WILL AND THE WAY

Good morning. On behalf of everyone at UNC-Chapel Hill, I want to echo Jack's welcome and thank our fellow conference sponsors for their support and all of you for agreeing to participate in what promises to be a lively and informative three days of discussion. Many people, including our sponsors have made a significant investment toward this effort, and I know that they have high expectations for this group to make a noteworthy contribution to the national discussion surrounding access to higher education.

Each of us in this room traveled our own paths to get to college. For some of us the path was set early in life and a college education was assumed, while others worked and earned scholarships.

Some of us, I imagine, interrupted studies because of military service or family needs, returning later to complete degrees. And some of us never expected to attend college at all. Regardless of our individual paths, all of us are where we are today in part because we have college degrees.

To illustrate my point, I want to tell some personal histories, and I hope you will indulge me if I begin with myself. I grew up in Texas in the 1950s in a solidly middle class family. We were never hungry, and we took a vacation someplace every year. My mother was a school teacher with a master's degree, and my father, who had only a high school education, was self-employed, and his income was often less than my mother's salary as a school teacher.

When time came to go to college, my parents struggled to send me off to the University of Texas, rather than my staying at home and attending the college in my home town. Even with \$25 tuition, with the cost of room and board, going to school away from home was a stretch for my family. I had part-time and summer jobs all through college to help pay the bills. While I didn't always have everything I wanted, I never thought of myself as poor, and I wasn't. Certainly not compared to my colleague Dan.

Dan grew up dirt poor in Arkansas. He remembers the amazing luck of a National Merit Scholarship and how his own luck didn't extend to his classmates, many of whom were as poor as he. He saw that opportunity rewarded some, and not others. Here is Dan's story in his own words:

"My father, with a fifth grade education, holds a letter from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation in callused, dirty hands. He turns it over, reading slowly. It's a *deus ex machina*, a one-way dream ticket, an escape from my future lifetime of sawmill labor, of hoping not to lose a finger, a hand or an arm in the saws.

“He gazes at me with doubt – it’s more money than he’s saved in a lifetime of backbreaking jobs. To him, it looks like a Publisher’s Clearinghouse ‘you might already be a winner’ marketing scam.

“Why would anyone do this?” he asks. “Why, indeed? A practical and moral question, one not easily answered. Heaven had vouchsafed a miracle; reality had exceeded my dreams. A teacher had believed in me, scheduled a qualifying exam, given me a chance.”

Thanks to a teacher’s intervention and a National Merit Scholarship, young Dan was afforded an opportunity that no one else in his class enjoyed.

In Asheville, North Carolina, Roy’s mother struggled to put food on the table. She learned that, after school, Roy and his friends would go to the service station downtown, where everybody would buy a Coke. Everybody except Roy. Roy drank water, because the price of Cokes had gone from five to ten cents, and he didn’t have a dime. When his mother discovered this, she made sure that there was a dime on the kitchen counter every morning when Roy went to school.

And then there’s Shirley who grew up in Michigan, the child of farmers with eighth-grade educations. She had already graduated from high school and had no plans for college. She was working at a summer job when her high school principal came to her and told her that she had too much potential to stop her education. She had to go to college, he said. And he helped her find the way.

I am sure that each of you could relate similar stories about yourself or someone you know. As some of you may have guessed by now, these stories belong to three of my colleagues here at Chapel Hill: Dan is Dan Reed, Chancellor’s Eminent Professor of Computer Science and Director of the Renaissance Computing Institute; Roy is Roy Williams, head coach of the Tar Heel Basketball team; and Shirley is Shirley Ort, associate provost and director of our Office of Scholarships and Student Aid.

They are, of course, highly accomplished and have made a tremendous difference in their chosen fields. They are stellar examples of the return that our society receives when it invests in higher education.

Dan, Roy and Shirley did not accomplish what they did without help. They, and countless others, made it to college because someone recognized their potential and showed them a way to dream dreams bigger than they had ever imagined. Because people they never met created programs that helped pave the way.

Each of us owes a debt to someone who helped us or guided us along the way. To quote the old proverb, we drink from wells we did not dig, and we are warmed by fires we did not build.

There is that other old saw we hear all the time – that every time you see a turtle on a fencepost, you know that he didn’t get there by himself. (I find that a curious example, because I’m not convinced that putting a turtle on a fence post is very helpful to the turtle.) The lesson in this is that we need to be careful to create programs that truly help people and not put turtles on fence posts.

This is the American dream – the idea that opportunity is available to anyone who seeks it. Surveys show that most Americans still believe this to be true to some degree. This belief in upward social mobility, in the idea that class does not determine the course of your life, persists across generations, in defiance of the reality that often contradicts it.

It is no surprise that Benjamin Franklin is probably the most popular figure among our country's founders.

As historian Gordon Wood reminds us in a recent book, Franklin's life "rising from the most obscure of origins to wealth and international preeminence" personifies the American dream.ⁱ

But how true is that dream today?

In our country's history, social class and other factors such as race, gender, and religious affiliation, limited opportunities for education. We North Carolinians are proud, justifiably so, of the founders who established the University of North Carolina, the nation's first public university. They believed that education was essential to the success of a republican form of government, and that it was the duty of the state to provide that education. Yet we tend to forget that in their eighteenth-century world, this concern extended only to a narrow sector of the population -- white male landowners.

Two hundred years later, we live in a far more egalitarian America. Gradually over time we have extended access to higher education in America from the few to the many. When given the access and the opportunity through policies and programs like the GI Bill and the Higher Education Act of 1965, people demonstrated that they were capable of tremendous achievements, and they helped make the United States a leader in science and technology, and the arts and culture.

We also know that class continues to limit opportunity; that it is a significant problem in spite of the American dream of social mobility, and the gap is growing. As Annette Lareau argues in her book, *Unequal Childhoods*, "The social position of one's family of origin has profound implications for life experiences and life outcomes. But the inequality our system creates and sustains is invisible and thus unrecognized.

"We would be better off as a country if we could enlarge our truncated vocabulary about the importance of social class."ⁱⁱ

As the gap grows between the wealthiest American families and the poorest, all indicators show that the disparity between the college-going rate of students by income levels is becoming greater. Quoting Tom Mortenson, Senior Scholar at the Pell Institute (and a conference participant here with us today): "The truth is that students growing up in wealthy families today have to work pretty hard not to obtain at least a bachelor's degree. By age 24, 75 percent of students from the top income quartile receive such degrees. For students growing up in low-income families, on the other hand, almost no amount of hard work will earn them that degree. Fewer than 9 percent of these students can earn a bachelor's degree by age 24."ⁱⁱⁱ

The pattern has not been much different in the state of North Carolina. There are two "North Carolinas" – the "golden arch" running along Interstates 85 and 40, where urban areas are thriving, and the other North Carolina, just off the interstates, where communities struggle with dying industries. North Carolina's population is growing, and growing more diverse.

We rank 6th in total population growth, and 9th in the highest growth rate. The state is experiencing the third fastest rate of growth among Hispanics following Texas and California. In fact, the Hispanic population increased by 400 percent between 1990 and 2000.

African Americans comprise more than 20% of the state's population, and Native Americans about 1.3%. North Carolina has the largest Native American population east of the Mississippi River. They are often the forgotten people in this state. The college attendance and dropout rates of all of these groups are matters that concern us greatly.

North Carolina's poverty rate is 13.4% and tied with Kentucky and Montana for the 14th highest poverty rate in the United States.

That is why we created the Carolina Covenant. As a public university in a state that remains deeply committed to providing a college education for its citizens, it was incumbent upon us to address the growing disparity between the two North Carolinas.

It was Shirley Ort who came to me a few years ago to say that, with a relatively modest commitment of resources, we could actually create a program wherein the neediest students who qualified for admission could graduate debt-free from Carolina if they were willing to work 10-12 hours a week in a work-study program.

It took time to work out the details, including a stable and reliable revenue stream that would support the program over the long term. We are fortunate to be in a progressive state whose legislature actually increased funding for need-based financial aid, even in lean times while budgets were being cut.

The University's Trustees gave the Covenant their full support. They had already directed 75% of our revenue from the sale of licensed products – those hats and t-shirts with our logo on them — toward need-based financial aid, and this, together with federal and state funding, provided almost all of what was needed to launch this program.

With additional support from private donors, we were able to close the funding delta. The Trustees subsequently increased the revenue stream from logo sales to 100%, making possible new merit-based scholarships in addition to the need-based support.

I am proud to say, that as a matter of policy, we have created merit-based scholarships on the strong foundation of a commitment to continue to meet 100% of the need on this campus. We have refused to allow one cent of need-based aid to flow to merit-based scholarships.

For us this is a bedrock principle. Need comes first. Then, merit. Other institutions may make other choices for their own reasons – reasons they find compelling – but Carolina has both the resources and the will to secure the foundation of need-based aid first, and we have done so. We remain committed to providing sufficient need-based aid to secure admission of a diverse class and keep the university available to students from all family income levels.

But the Covenant is more than an enhanced financial aid program. We have taken care to ensure academic and personal success for students from low-income families by implementing a faculty and staff mentoring program around our Covenant Scholars.

We know that these students, who fully meet our admission standards, are nonetheless more at risk academically. Many of them will be expected to send money home because they have traditionally been part of the family support structure. Many will be tempted to work more than we think advisable.

Therefore, we have established a cadre of volunteer faculty mentors. We provide them with a small stipend to support their work and to give them some resources to buy a lunch for a student or provide a theatre ticket. We have incorporated a career development program, and we teach social skills and etiquette as a part of this program.

One of the key elements is a formal meal, where we help these students learn how to interact in that kind of social environment so they gain the self-confidence and poise they will need for success in the academic or business world.

The tragic fact is that we have scores of students with backgrounds not unlike Dan, Roy and Shirley. They come from all over North Carolina – the mountains in the west, or down east, where, in that part of North Carolina east of Interstate 95, were it a separate state, would be the poorest state in America. They also come from West Virginia, from Massachusetts, and my home state of Texas. Poverty knows no boundaries.

The Carolina Covenant provides hope, and helps people to realize dreams. When we started, our research revealed that many families believed that Chapel Hill was financially unattainable just because we are highly selective academically. We wanted to send the message that, if you do the necessary work in high school, apply for admission and get accepted, we will provide the means.

To paraphrase a well-known statement from former North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford, we say to these young people, **“If you have the will, we have the way.”**

We think of the Covenant as an ethical and moral commitment, and indeed, we knew when we established it, that it fit our core values as a public university. It fit our history and tradition. Former UNC President Frank Porter Graham, used to say that we “take the sons and daughters of mill hands and farmers and turn them into leaders.” Dan Reed, Roy Williams and Shirley Ort are leaders in their respective fields. They have strengthened the University and the State in immeasurable ways. So have, and will, countless others.

There is clearly a benefit to the individual recipient of this assistance, but a far greater benefit to society. And, it is not just a matter of social justice and equity, but addressing this issue is a matter of national competitiveness.

Last week the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education released a new report entitled *Measuring Up 2006*, and for the first time, this report compares the United States with other countries. The data could not be more revealing.

While the United States remains high in the list of countries with young adults enrolled in college, we are no longer the world leader in that category. While other countries have raced to increase college attendance, the United States has slowed its growth. As noted in the report summary, “For most of the 1990s, the United States ranked last among 14 nations in raising college participation rates, with almost no increase during the last decade. This ... performance has continued into this decade.” In addition, we rank 16th among 27 countries compared in the proportion of students who complete college degree or certificate programs.^{iv}

The new technologies, innovations, and businesses in the 21st century will be created by highly educated people, and as a country we are not doing enough. These people are our intellectual capital and we need them for our nation to thrive and grow, and to be secure in the world.

There is another critical social issue, that of social stability. For most of the 20th Century we enjoyed increasing upward mobility in this country thanks to an array of programs and initiatives. Now we are experiencing a growing gap between rich and poor that threatens the very ladder of upward mobility. The middle rungs of this ladder are missing.

Former Labor Secretary Robert Reich perhaps stated it best when he reported that, “At the end of the 20th century, the richest 1 percent of American families, comprising 2.7 million people, had just about as many dollars to spend, after they had paid all taxes, as the bottom 100 million. ... That represents the largest concentration of both income and wealth in more than a century.” We know that the situation has only worsened in the last six years. ^v

Higher education is literally the gatekeeper to the door of opportunity—the opportunity for full, meaningful and productive lives. Are we unintentionally denying access through our own institutional policies? How do we structure our admission requirements? What kind of messages do we send to prospective students from low income families, to the most disadvantaged sectors of our population? What kinds of financial aid do we offer and how much, and how do we build a campus culture that nurtures and supports progress to success. And it’s not just a matter of access, but access to *what*. How do we support their efforts to succeed, assuring the successful completion of degrees?

Let me be quick to say that each institution must answer these questions in the context of its own culture and values. We make no apologies at UNC for being highly selective, and we have made no accommodation in our admission standards for the Carolina Covenant students. In fact, they are considered for the program only *after* they have been admitted in a need-blind process. -

Other institutions may, indeed, should take a different approach, given their mission and culture. We benefit from an incredible diversity of institutions in this country, from community colleges, to private institutions, and public universities of varying degrees of selectivity, mission, and scope. All of us, however, need to address this fundamental question of access to success. No sector of the higher education community can ignore it. *This is a fundamental American value.*

We have a larger responsibility in this debate – that of “speaking truth to power.” It is within the halls of academe that the research is being compiled, and it is our role to share our knowledge and insight with policymakers and the public’s representatives. As academic leaders, we must use our bully pulpit to lead, to build the will within the power structure to find the way.

To give credibility to our pulpits, we have to begin at home. This means allocating the necessary institutional resources. This means saying no to the diversion of need-based aid funds to merit-based scholarships just to beef up the rankings. It means convincing university governing boards, state legislators, donors and voters to have the will to broaden access to higher education. And it means molding public opinion to demand from Congress and the President a renewed national commitment to student aid, despite federal budget deficits.

Some of these conversations will be about topics that make us uncomfortable, topics such as

- the problems of America’s “working poor,” and how lower wages, a rising cost of living, and lesser opportunities for jobs impact their children’s future
- the children of undocumented immigrants who graduate from our high schools and find themselves in a legal limbo as non-residents in most states
- economically disadvantaged public schools and the problems with identifying qualified low-income students

- the appalling dropout and retention rates among segments of the student population, notably African American males and Native Americans.

These are tough political questions, and policymakers face emotional and complex resistance in many areas. We are educators and part of our job is to enlighten these very policymakers, giving them the information and the vision they need to make informed policy. America was created by courageous men in the 18th century, and she desperately needs courageous women and men in the 21st Century.

Let me conclude with one more story, the story of a student I shall call Kim. Kim is an Asian immigrant. She grew up in the foothills of North Carolina, with her brother and six sisters. Kim's father was laid off from his job at a furniture factory – and from the job he held before that one; her mother's job in a hosiery mill doesn't pay enough to support the family of ten. Their combined family income was a little over \$37,000.

Throughout high school, Kim worked 20 hours a week at a local hamburger stand to help meet her family's financial needs. She functioned as translator and liaison for her family for school, medical, and other needs. Her family relied heavily on her.

Yet Kim was a talented student. Her high school grades and SAT scores (1300) were good and qualified her for admission to Chapel Hill. She enrolled at UNC as a Covenant Scholar in fall, 2004, with more than \$7,000 in outside scholarships from her church and civic organizations, in recognition of her talent.

Kim's mother wanted her to come to UNC – so, her mother said, “she could make lots of money and help her little brothers and sisters.” At the same time, because of their very real financial needs, Kim's mother did not understand why she could not both pursue a rigorous college education and continue to work enough to send money home to the family.

Kim is now a junior and has done well at Carolina. She has maintained a 3.3 grade point average, and has twice been on the Dean's list. She has also had the opportunity to study abroad, and, in her words, “escape the low-wage job” for the summer.

For Kim, and so many others like her, a college education is the key to a brighter future. She plans to complete her education as quickly as possible so she can get a good job and help her brothers and sisters so they may also have the opportunity for a college education. She also plans on a career which uses her mastery of multiple languages including Chinese. She has shaped her own dreams.

As you proceed through the next three days, I want you to keep Kim's image in mind. Keep in mind the image of the Kims on your own campuses or neighborhood. Not just to remind you that these matters have a human face, but also because her story illustrates so many of the challenges we face. A child of immigrants, whose poorly educated parents struggle to find and keep low-paying jobs that pay less than the family needs to support itself. The dropout rate statistics are filled with young people just like her.

This state – and our nation – has many students like Kim. She is not a marginal figure in a remote North Carolina county – she is this country's future – and her counterparts can be found in the Rio Grande valley in Texas, in the hills of West Virginia, in immigrant enclaves in New York and Los Angeles, on Native American reservations, and in small towns and rural communities throughout the country.

It is the Kims that we must find and educate. That is our challenge. That is our charge.

We know the way. Let's find the will.

NOTES

ⁱ Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin*, 2005.

ⁱⁱ Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, 2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Family Income, and Higher Education Opportunity 1970 – 2003." *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, Number 156. June 2005.

^{iv} Patrick M. Callan, "Introduction: International Comparisons Highlight Educational Gaps Between Young and Older Americans," *Measuring Up 2006*, <http://measuringup.highereducation.org/>, accessed 9/5/2006.

^v Robert B. Reich, "How Selective Colleges Heighten Inequality, 9/15/00"; www.prospect.org, accessed 9/10/06.