

**UNC Asheville Chancellor Nomination Statement
by UNC System President Peter Hans
November 29, 2023**

UNC Asheville is a special place. It is unique not just within our System, but among public universities nationwide. It is designed to bring the very best of the liberal arts and sciences experience to students of all backgrounds. It deserves a leader who recognizes and embraces that mission. UNC Asheville students deserve a champion who makes their success the first priority. Faculty deserve a chancellor who relishes the vibrant culture and commitment to academic integrity there. Staff deserve an advocate working alongside them with earnest goodwill.

And the entire region deserves a university that is rising and thriving alongside one of the nation's best and most interesting small cities. UNC Asheville deserves a leader whose ambitions for educational opportunity, economic impact, and cultural influence match the region's growth. UNC Asheville is and must continue to be a critical asset for the mountains and the entire state.

In more than three years leading the UNC System, I have had the privilege of nominating three chancellors and the CEO of PBS North Carolina. Each of those decisions was taken with deep care and deliberation, and with consultation among all the many stakeholders we serve. Leadership decisions on a university campus have a lasting impact on the institution and the people who depend on it, affecting not just the work of today but the legacy we leave for tomorrow.

Today, I'm enormously proud to nominate someone who is already lighting the way to a more ambitious future for UNC Asheville, opening a new era of academic excellence and rejuvenating the university's commitment to the liberal arts and sciences. I am confident that Dr. Kimberly van Noort is the right leader for this moment in UNC Asheville's proud history.

Her deep background in the liberal arts affirms that she will be an enthusiastic steward of UNC Asheville's unique place among public universities. Her wealth of experience as an administrator means that she can back up her support for UNCA's mission with the skills and insight to strengthen the university and put its commitments into effective practice for more students.

During her service as interim provost and then interim chancellor, she has demonstrated an openness and eagerness to connect with constituents across campus and in the wider Asheville community. She has shown the right combination of respect for tradition and willingness to explore new possibilities. Most of all, she has shown how much she cares for the future of this university and the students it serves, and how effectively she can make the case for UNCA's enduring importance to our state.

Dr. van Noort has had an extraordinary journey that seems almost tailor-made for the chancellorship of UNC Asheville. Her academic career is deeply rooted in the humanities, with undergraduate and graduate degrees in French and French Literature. She secured her first academic appointment at the University of Texas at Arlington, bringing the wonders of French language and culture to a diverse student body from North Texas and beyond.

As the associate dean for academic affairs in the College of Liberal Arts, she developed and implemented the first-ever faculty workload policy at UT Arlington, created new guidelines for faculty performance reviews, restructured student advising in a successful effort to increase retention, and developed a curricular support program for an online nursing degree, among many other accomplishments. She then led the institution's interdisciplinary degree programs, research centers, and academic student success services. Here again, many of her achievements align with our own key initiatives. She developed a new degree completion program for working adults that built on their professional experience and prior learning, implemented an analytics-driven student success platform to improve support services, and boosted student advising to reflect research-based best practices for improving outcomes. She also served as the associate vice provost for undergraduate studies, where she led a comprehensive overhaul of the university's core curriculum.

So, the UNC System was exceedingly fortunate to recruit Dr. van Noort in 2016, first as vice president for academic programs, faculty, and research, and then as senior vice president for academic affairs and chief academic officer. Dr. van Noort demonstrated an eagerness to take on some of the largest challenges and to work in collaboration with her counterparts across the state. She is clearly driven by work that has a meaningful impact for students and faculty — creating the Math Pathways Project to help overcome one of the core obstacles on the path to graduation; strengthening community college partnerships to welcome talented students from all backgrounds; building an online digital institute and virtual coaching for faculty across the System to support faculty through the incredible challenges of the pandemic; and championing a number of creative ideas to support student mental health. Dr. van Noort understands the power of policy and smart resource investment to improve the lives of scholars, staff, and most importantly, students.

During the past year, her leadership at UNC Asheville has been equally inspiring. She has sharpened focus on enrollment and financial aid and shifted the institution to a proactive, student-friendly approach that has already resulted in a long-sought turnaround in the campus' enrollment trends. This fall marked a 25% increase in UNCA's incoming first-year students — without sacrificing academic qualifications — and a retention rate for all students of over 90%, the highest in three years. Dr. van Noort oversaw a new marketing initiative, strengthened capacity in key leadership positions, successfully navigated through accreditation reaffirmation, and made effective use of legislative funding to put UNC Asheville on a sounder organizational footing.

Recognizing the importance of connecting Asheville's academic strengths with students' life ambitions, Dr. van Noort has already begun work to highlight career exploration within the curriculum and shift the career center to engage with students from their earliest days on campus. Combined with sharper oversight of students' academic progress, these efforts will result in more students graduating on time and with a clear plan for their next steps. Throughout her time at Asheville, Dr. van Noort has made a point of being a visible, open, and optimistic leader — someone equally happy to be in the dining hall with a group of students or joining a meeting of prominent business and civic leaders from across the region. She has worked hard to welcome faculty feedback and input, and to infuse the campus culture with a sense of ambition and possibility.

I am also encouraged that Dr. van Noort has agreed to a shift in the compensation model for UNC Asheville's chancellorship, putting more weight on incentive pay and less on base salary. Her earnings will now depend in large measure on her ability to deliver tangible results for UNC Asheville and the students it serves, improving core metrics such as retention, graduation, and reduced student debt. This aligns with the direction we've moved for my role as UNC System president, and I'd like to see it become more commonplace over time across our System. Having leadership incentives well aligned with strategic goals is a good management practice and demonstrates, I believe it shows accountability at all levels.

By statute, chancellors report directly to the UNC System president. I am, in turn, held accountable by this Board for the performance of our campus leaders. This responsibility and accountability are at the heart of the chancellor search policy that this Board approved last spring. The UNC Asheville search was the first conducted under the new policy, and I believe the result proves its value. Being involved in the search process from the very beginning, instead of at the end, gave us all the opportunity to know the candidates well at the same time and feel confident in the nomination I put before you. It also afforded me the chance to meet promising education leaders who may find another role within our System, and to hear the hopes and aspirations that so many people hold for UNC Asheville. The input from faculty, staff, students, trustees, alumni, supporters, and community members was invaluable, and I'm grateful for the chance to take it all in. It gives me enormous confidence in the future of UNCA.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank the members of the UNC Asheville Search Advisory Committee for their hard work and devotion to this university. It has been a real pleasure working with such a dedicated group of individuals who take seriously their shared responsibility for UNCA's future. A special word of thanks to Roger Aiken, chair of the UNCA Board of Trustees, who also led the search advisory committee. Roger has been a tremendous partner every step of the way, and I am grateful for his leadership and commitment. Roger said that his job was to make my decision difficult to choose among great finalists and he was true to his word.

This search process was thorough and inspiring. We had over 130 applicants from across the country, many of them very highly qualified. It was a wonderful affirmation of UNCA's reputation nationally to see so many outstanding and accomplished individuals seek the chancellorship of this institution. Applicants were carefully screened, semi-finalists and finalists were put through a rigorous interview process, and we conducted an exhaustive due diligence review. That Dr. van Noort emerged from this highly competitive candidate pool and rigorous process is a testament to her strength of leadership, her depth of commitment, her knowledge and experience, her passion for this institution, and her enthusiasm for its future.

It is with joy and great expectations that I nominate Dr. Kim van Noort as the next chancellor of the University of North Carolina Asheville. She is the right leader at the right time for this exceptional institution. Go Bulldogs.