

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education
Belk Center for Community College
Leadership and Research



A black and white photograph showing a diverse group of professionals, including men and women of various ethnicities, sitting in rows and looking towards the right side of the frame. They appear to be attending a conference or seminar. The background is slightly blurred.

2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT

ABOUT THE BELK CENTER

Mission

The Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research at North Carolina State University develops and sustains exceptional community college leaders who are committed to advancing equitable college access and student success, the social and economic mobility of their colleges' students, and the economic competitiveness of their regions. The Belk Center provides professional development and research related to current and emerging student success opportunities and challenges facing community college leaders and policymakers in North Carolina and the nation.

Vision

The Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research aims to be a nationally recognized model in the creation and sustainment of critical partnerships among community college leaders in advancing equity in student access and success while increasing the attainment of postsecondary credentials of value.

Values

- Excellence
- Equity-mindedness
- Leadership
- Collaboration
- Service

Commitment to Equity

We commit to racial equity through dismantling the systemic barriers that impede historically underserved populations, especially Black, Latin*, and American Indian students, from achieving their academic, economic, and social success through our evaluation, research, and support for developing the next generation of community college leaders.

We commit to enabling executive leaders to utilize evidence-based tools and culturally relevant strategies to inform decisions that lead to equitable student success for historically underserved populations.

We commit to centering the experiences and outcomes of Black, Latin*, and American Indian students in our research and in the preparation of future community college leaders.

¹ Following Salinas (2020), we use Latin* to refer to individuals that may have been classified as Latinx, Latino, Latina, Latine, or Hispanic using other classification structures and data sources. The term Latin* is respectful of the various linguistic groups that comprise this racial/ethnic identification and is sensitive to a variety of gender identities.

Letter from the Director



Dear Colleagues,

The past two years have ushered in unique opportunities and profound difficulties for community college education amid COVID-19 and other challenges. In response, the Belk Center has offered robust support to North Carolina's community colleges, in new and innovative formats, at a time when resources and morale have been stretched thin. Throughout this period of upheaval, our deep relationships with executive leaders, scholars, legislators, and philanthropists have been instrumental in shaping our approach to community college leadership and research. Our accomplishments in 2021-22 represent the busiest year yet for the Belk Center. **Over the past 12 months, we have:**

Equipped leaders to tackle pressing issues. We sustained our support for executive leaders by offering opportunities to enhance teaching and learning; orientation programs and resources for new presidents; and a new initiative for rural college leaders to improve student outcomes and advance equity in their educational systems. Meanwhile, our ongoing support of doctoral student research, writing, and professional development continues to set up emerging leaders for success.

Distilled knowledge into actionable insights. This year, the Belk Center promoted our long-standing PACE campus climate survey among presidents of North Carolina's rural community colleges as an avenue for pursuing data-driven institutional effectiveness. Emerging research on transfer students, adult learners, career coaching, and college access is also enabling leaders to tackle complex problems of practice. Policy audits and equity case studies are yielding insights into barriers and opportunities for improving the success of American Indian, Black, and Latin* students.

Created opportunities for actionable partnerships. The 2021 Dallas Herring Lecture was the most diverse and accessible gathering of community college stakeholders we have sponsored to date,

attracting attendees from 28 states across the country. Participants included college presidents, educational researchers, nonprofit leaders, and philanthropists, all of whom were convened to collectively imagine solutions to what keynote speaker and community college president Gregory Haile called "converging crises facing our communities—economic disruption, a racial reckoning, and the pandemic."

Through this report, we are excited to share the Belk Center's work in each of these areas, made possible by the dedication of our staff and the countless contributions of our strategic partners, including: colleagues at individual colleges, the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents, the North Carolina Community College System Office, the University of North Carolina System Office, the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees, the North Carolina Office of Strategic Partnerships, myFutureNC, EducationNC, the Hunt Institute, LatinxEd, the Center for Racial Equity in Education, Achieving the Dream, Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, and the League for Innovation in the Community College, among others.

Over the past four years, the Belk Center has emerged as a trusted partner of community colleges throughout the state. We are proud of our contributions to community college excellence in North Carolina thus far. They are manifest in our executive leadership programs, doctoral student support services, research and evaluation efforts, and professional networks. As we enter the Belk Center's fifth year and begin a new chapter, past successes will provide a strong foundation for continued collaboration and innovation in pursuit of our mission—and we invite you to join us on the journey!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Audrey J. Jaeger".

Audrey J. "AJ" Jaeger, Ph.D.
Executive Director of the Belk Center
for Community College Leadership and Research
W. Dallas Herring Professor of Community College Education

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We thank the John M. Belk Endowment for their generous support of the Belk Center and for making the work outlined in this report possible.

The 2021-22 academic year was a pivotal one for the Belk Center. Ongoing leadership and research efforts once again informed meaningful change in the College of Education at NC State University and across North Carolina's network of 58 community colleges.

Meanwhile, faculty and staff spearheaded new initiatives to meet emerging needs in an ever-changing community college landscape.

Together, the Belk Center's perennial programs and innovative enterprises catalyzed college leaders to effect change throughout the community college system; created relevant, contextual, and accessible knowledge to shape policy and practice; and convened key stakeholders who have the resources and relationships to collectively address pressing needs.

CATALYZING COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXCELLENCE

Presidents' Academy and Critical Conversations

Support for executive leadership within North Carolina community colleges remains a centerpiece of the Belk Center's work. In partnership with the North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents (NCACCP), we continue to offer professional learning opportunities that align with presidents' goals and needs. To this end, we resumed the "Critical Conversations" series this year. It included two interactive sessions on the role of presidential leadership in elevating excellence in teaching and learning, and an additional session focused on best practices of 150 institutions considered for the biannual Aspen Prize for community college excellence.

2021-22 CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS



Leading Improvement in Teaching and Learning: Engaging Faculty Innovators (October 2021)

This critical conversation addressed how to leverage dedicated and innovative faculty by positioning them at the center of teaching reforms. It included a focus on faculty hiring, onboarding, promotions, and professional development.



Leading Improvement in Teaching and Learning: Institutionalizing Systems and Practices for Sustained Improvement (January 2022)

At this gathering, presidents considered ways to institutionalize systems and practices that make teaching and learning improvements sustainable. It explored how strategic finance and effective data use in particular can support teaching and learning reforms.



The Aspen Prize: Identifying and Learning from Exceptional Colleges (April 2022)

The session featured insights from the executive director and the senior program manager of the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program. The Belk Center provided benchmarking data for participants to compare their institutional progress with the top 150 community colleges eligible for the Aspen Prize.

"North Carolina's community colleges are essential to fostering economic mobility and developing talent in every part of the state. To advance those goals, North Carolina community colleges and their leaders are doing really important work to improve student success. They are fortunate to have a unique partner in the Belk Center, which provides essential research and professional development opportunities to strengthen outcomes of students while in college and after they graduate."

-Joshua Wyner, Vice President, Aspen Institute & Executive Director, Aspen College Excellence Program

BELK CENTER BY THE NUMBERS

30

North Carolina community colleges represented at 2021-22 Presidents' Academy and Critical Conversations events

14

Presidents from North Carolina community colleges who participated in the 2022 New Presidents Orientation offered in partnership with NCACCP

47

Research projects conducted by doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars across the country as part of the Postsecondary Career and Technical Education Research Fellows Program

44

Professional learning opportunities offered via Teaching & Learning Hubs and attended by educators from 36 colleges across the state

19

North Carolina community colleges that participated in equity-focused initiatives like policy audits, the Rural College Leaders Program, and NC Reconnect during the past academic year

28

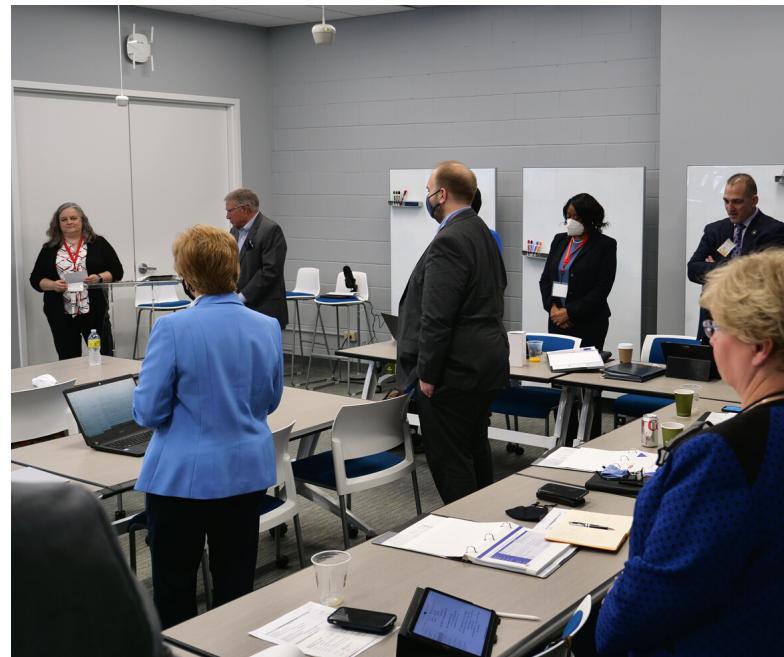
States represented by attendees of this year's Dallas Herring Lecture, "Redefining Access: The Power of Proximity," held in November 2021

The Belk Center also advanced a commitment to executive leadership during the past year by collaborating with NCACCP to host an inaugural orientation program for new presidents in the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS).

Fourteen college leaders attended the orientation, which drew on the expertise of their presidents and their executive colleagues throughout the state as well as the NCCCS Office.

"The Belk Center's orientation for new presidents was an incredibly valuable resource. Knowing that the Belk Center exists to support us, meet our needs, and provide us with opportunities to network with colleagues from across the system has been so helpful as I've made the transition to North Carolina and to my new role."

- Dr. Murray J. Williams, President, Roanoke-Chowan Community College



Rural College Leaders Program

This year, the Belk Center was pleased to offer targeted support for 10 community colleges serving rural counties in North Carolina.

Made possible with support from the Ascendium Education Group and Achieving the Dream (ATD), the [Rural College Leaders Program \(RCLP\)](#) was launched to equip presidents, senior leadership teams, and trustees to improve student outcomes and advance equity at their institutions.

This three-year, capacity-building initiative offers strategies for removing systemic barriers and closing gaps in institutional completion rates for historically underserved populations, including low-income students and American Indian, Black, and Latin* students.

A key component of RCLP is its focus on obtaining and analyzing student success data to ensure goals for equitable outcomes are being met. ATD has provided each participating institution with a data coach and the Belk Center has worked with ATD to promote use of the Community College Research Center's tool for reporting and assessing equity in program enrollment. Additionally, the Belk Center is facilitating the exploration of a shared service model to address capacity issues in institutional research at many of RCLP's participating colleges.

"MTCC's participation in the Rural College Leaders Program is helping to build change-makers on our new administrative team. As one of the smaller institutions in the 'Great 58' [North Carolina community colleges], resources are tight and it is often tough for us to participate in regional and national professional development. Joining the RCLP network has connected our team with national thought leaders who are challenging us to think differently about prioritizing student learning and success in new, innovative ways."

- Dr. Brian Merritt, President,
McDowell Technical Community College

***** RURAL COLLEGE LEADERS PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS *****

	CARTERET COMMUNITY COLLEGE		MCDOWELL TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE
	CATAWBA VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE		ROANOKE-CHOWAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE
	COLLEGE OF THE ALBEMARLE		STANLY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
	DAVIDSON-DAVIE COMMUNITY COLLEGE		VANCE-GRANVILLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
	ISOTHERMAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE		WESTERN PIEDMONT COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Teaching and Learning Hubs

The Belk Center's [teaching and learning "hubs"](#), created in partnership with ATD and North Carolina's Student Success Center, continue to catalyze community college excellence by equipping educators across the state with context-specific, evidence-based strategies for student success.



East and West hubs, established last year, engaged more than 500 educators from 36 community colleges in professional learning opportunities. Topics included creating transparent assignments, designing effective and engaging online discussions, equitizing the syllabus, and fostering inclusive college environments.

The West hub utilized an innovative new workshop format, coined the West Hub Café, that enabled faculty from different colleges to share their active learning strategies in an informal and collegial atmosphere. Meanwhile, the East hub aimed to make its fall summit more accessible to faculty by offering professional learning opportunities on different days, at alternating times, and for varying session lengths.

This year marked the creation of two more hubs that will serve 26 institutions in the Central and Piedmont regions of North Carolina, ensuring coverage for all 58 community colleges within the four hubs.

Going forward, the Belk Center plans to expand the scope of professional learning opportunities by creating faculty learning communities, tailoring support for faculty in specific disciplines, and engaging affiliate college leaders in hosting professional learning opportunities.

Writing and Coaching Services

The Belk Center's professional development offerings extend beyond current presidents to students in NC State College of Education's Community College Leadership doctoral program. As students progress through their courses and begin conducting their own dissertation research, comprehensive writing support and coaching becomes invaluable. During the past year, our dedicated writing and data coach continued offering many popular services, including one-on-one coaching sessions, weekly writing groups, and an array of online resources. Doctoral students spoke to the multiple benefits of these services:

"Disciplined writing sessions with other dissertation-minded and goal-oriented students was motivating."

"I appreciate the ability to use the coach on a regularly scheduled basis to check my thinking and to make sure that I am on the right track. The tips are often things I have not previously considered and have made my writing process smoother."

Mentorship and Fellowship Opportunities

In its third year, [the Belk Center's Conference Fellows program](#) engaged seven students in DREAM 2022, ATD's annual convening of educational leaders and practitioners. Upon their return to campus, fellows shared their conference learnings via a 90-minute webinar for Belk Center staff, doctoral program faculty and students, and colleagues from ATD. Ten additional fellows attended the 2022 Virtual Innovations Conference sponsored by the League for Innovation in the Community College.

In the past academic year, 14 community college leaders in the Belk Center's network served as mentors for first-year and second-year students in the Community College Leadership doctoral program. These mentorships continue to provide access to professional networking and experiential learning that sets students up for success in future leadership roles.

Going forward, NC State's College of Education plans to sustain both the Mentor and Fellows Programs to ensure their impact on students' professional development for years to come.



"The Belk Center Fellows program is a fantastic opportunity for practitioners and aspiring community college leaders to connect with others across the country in collaborative and impactful ways. By engaging with thought leaders about their challenges and approaches to addressing barriers to student success, I learned about their experiences and how they adapted to a wide array of student needs. I was able to bring their best practices back to my institution to enhance our holistic support offerings."

**- Chris Pearce, Vice President & CIO,
Forsyth Technical Community College
2020 Charlotte Cohort, Community
College Leadership Doctoral Program**

The Postsecondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) Research Fellows Program, sponsored by the ECMC Foundation and directed by Dr. James Bartlett and Dr. Michelle Bartlett, successfully concluded its three-year, \$2 million grant in January. The program is set to continue through 2025 with a second grant awarded in February. The initial grant supported 47 research projects completed by doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars at universities across the country. NC State also received an additional \$25,000 to support five collaborative postsecondary CTE projects.

As Dr. James Bartlett noted, “The research funded by this program has led to more than 150 research presentations on postsecondary career and technical education at national conferences, expanding both the high-quality research available to the field and the visibility of the work of CTE programs in community college settings.”



MENTOR SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Algie Gatewood President, Alamance Community College

Q: What interested you most about serving as a mentor? What contributions do you hope to make in this role?

A: My main interest has been the opportunity to share with mentees from my experience. Often, there may be inconsistencies between what a senior leader, or even a community college, actually does and what is perceived. The mentee/mentor experience is an excellent way for one to get a closer, more realistic view of how leaders and colleges operate.

Q: Tell us about your mentees and how you work together. What have you learned from your mentees through this program?

A: Activities with my mentees have included, but are not limited to, roundtable discussions with senior state legislators; attending college Board of Trustees meetings; and participating in discussions with leaders from community colleges, myFutureNC, and the local Chamber of Commerce to learn how each of them interface and collaborate to ensure that workforce development, education, and training meet the needs of local and state entities.

Each mentee I have worked with has brought information about themselves and their work to the table, and from time to time I have learned from them some ways to improve things in my own college.

Q: How does mentorship enhance the doctoral experience for students in the Community College Leadership doctoral program?

A: Simply put, the more students engage and invest in the mentorship experience, the more they get out of it. The most important enhancement factor is that the mentee gets a pragmatic view of what they are learning in their doctoral program.

MENTEE SPOTLIGHT



Jeremy Jones

Transition Specialist, Hire Heroes USA

2021 Raleigh Cohort, Community College Leadership Doctoral Program

Q: Tell us about your mentor and how the two of you work together. What has been the most valuable aspect of the mentorship so far?

A: The most valuable aspect of my relationship with my mentor is his transparency. He is always open and willing to allow his mentees to attend board meetings and discussions with government figures. He remains open to any conversation about how we, as future leaders, can spearhead positions in prospective areas.

Q: How did having a mentor shape your first-year experience in the Community College Leadership doctoral program?

A: Having a mentor during my first year has built my confidence and momentum toward achieving great things as I continue through the program. The mentorship program has been influential for students like me looking to inject new blood into leadership capacities.



Joey Bryant

Department Chair, Forsyth Technical Community College

2021 Raleigh Cohort, Community College Leadership Doctoral Program

Q: What professional experiences has your mentor connected you with? How have they set you up for success?

A: My mentor provided me with one-on-one time with each member of her executive leadership team and her administrative assistant. During the North Carolina Association of Community College Trustees conference, she and some of her board members also invited us to an informal dinner where we discussed their roles and vital information for our future careers.

Q: What do you hope your mentorship will provide as you move through the doctoral program and into new professional roles?

A: Working with an executive mentor has opened doors for networking and learning about other colleges. My mentor is early in her presidency, so listening and learning to her advice has already benefited me in how I approach my current position and the doctoral program.

CREATING KNOWLEDGE THAT GUIDES DECISION MAKING

Supporting Rural Colleges

The Belk Center's research areas are strategically designed to align with and reinforce leadership programs that catalyze community college change. For example, the equity case study initiative that began last year is meaningfully informing our work with rural college leaders by identifying programs and practices that can lead to improved outcomes for underserved students in rural settings. A team of higher education scholars from diverse institutions (Durham Technical Community College, East Carolina University, Howard University, NC State University, and William & Mary) conducted the case studies and initial findings suggest:



To promote the development of policies that advance a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion, the research team also collaborated with case study campuses to review their institutional policies and recommend policy changes. Using the [2021 NCCCS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force Final Report](#) as a guide, researchers and college leaders identified: opportunities to more fully address diversity and inclusion in personnel and governance policies; barriers to access, persistence, and completion resulting from payment policies; residency and citizen-based restrictions that affect admission, course enrollment, and financial aid eligibility; the absence of explicit institutional equity commitments; and other policy inequities.

Another way the Belk Center demonstrates a commitment to rural colleges involves the longstanding [PACE climate survey](#). This year, PACE underwent a substantial rebranding process to improve the utility of its website and enhance promotional materials. These materials were used to target presidents of 48 rural North Carolina colleges and encourage their participation in a complimentary administration of PACE. Data from PACE has helped guide improvements to institutional structure, work environments, and capacity to promote student success on these campuses.

Improving Community College Access

Research priorities at the Belk Center are also guided by a commitment to community college access as a vital precursor to student success. Our 2021 report, [Supporting the College and Career Transition from High School to Beyond During Times of Uncertainty](#), served as the foundation for a deeper analysis of career coaching and college access programs (e.g., College Advising Corps, Gear Up, Upward Bound) in North Carolina. One Belk Center evaluation team collected and analyzed qualitative data from 18 people working at service organizations and three high schools in the northwest region of the state. They identified promising practices for college and career access providers, which will be showcased in a series of three briefs released this fall.

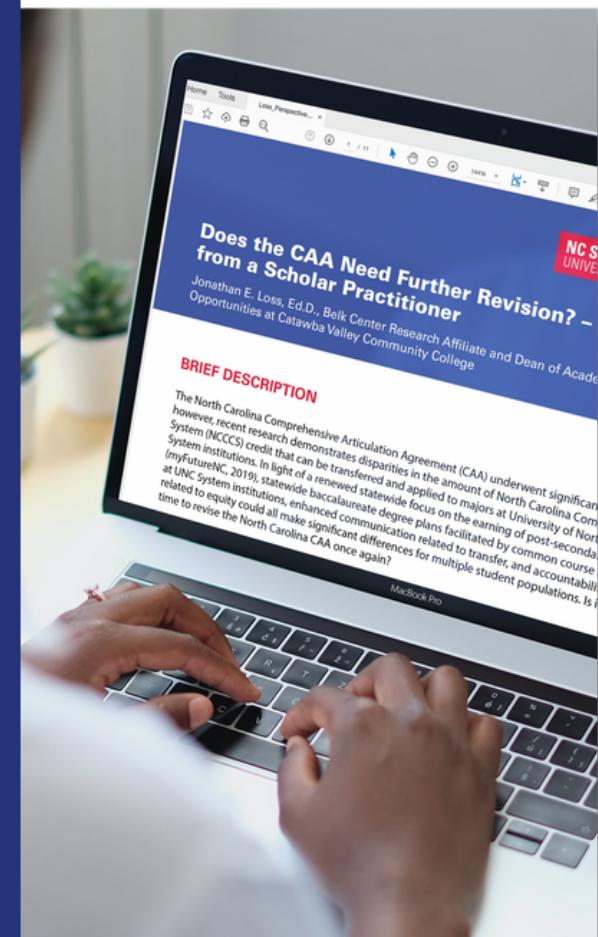
Another team completed an evaluation of the state-wide career coaching program for NCCCS. Team members distributed a survey to all career coaches and conducted five focus groups and eight individual interviews. Insights from this evaluation suggest several possibilities for programmatic improvements, including clarifying job description roles and expectations, streamlining administrative burden, and bolstering professional development opportunities for coaches. [A research brief about the career coaching evaluation was published](#) in August 2022.

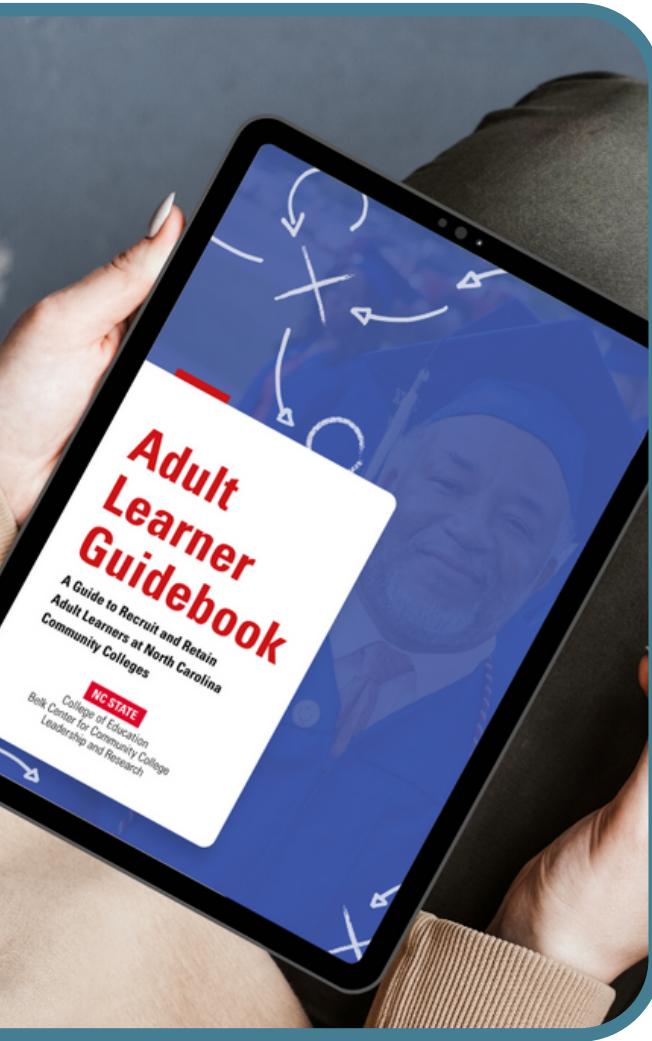
Facilitating Persistence and Retention

This year, we deepened our engagement in transfer research through several key studies. The first was funded by the Association for Public and Land-Grant Universities and examined the relationship between degree pathway credits earned at North Carolina community colleges and degree completion at four-year institutions within the UNC System. The study engaged five UNC universities and revealed that community college students are not fully utilizing curricular resources, including baccalaureate degree plans (BDPs), before transferring to a four-year institution.

Additionally, we learned that BDPs can look very different from one university to another, even within the same major—which can complicate the transfer process for many students. These and other findings will be publicly shared in a report later this year, which will inform state-wide initiatives to improve transfer through streamlining the format and delivery of BDPs to community college students who intend to transfer to a public university.

A second study, conducted at the request of NC State's enrollment management team, used 10 years of longitudinal data to identify courses and disciplines in which community college transfer students performed significantly better or worse than their peers. This work identified several key courses, particularly in math and science, that appear to be barriers for transfer students' progression. The analysis helped enrollment leaders target these specific courses for additional student and faculty support. The Belk Center research team plans to expand this line of inquiry in the coming year through a series of studies using a state-wide course-level dataset.





NC Reconnect is another important research endeavor aimed at improving student retention specifically among adult learners in North Carolina. After the launch of NC Reconnect last year, Belk Center researchers began compiling and analyzing data on adult students' re-enrollment and retention from five colleges participating in the pilot phase of the study. These institutions then implemented targeted marketing and recruitment campaigns for adult learners. We presented findings from the pilot phase to interested stakeholders, including NCACCP, the State Board of Community Colleges, and the Council for the Study of Community Colleges.

An adult learner guidebook was also released that offers tangible strategies and key insights on reimaging postsecondary education for adult learners at North Carolina community colleges.

In the coming year, NC Reconnect will continue to expand. Additional colleges will join the effort with the support of the John M. Belk Endowment, Belk Center, NCCCS, myFutureNC, InsideTrack, Crisp Communications, and VisionPoint Marketing.

• • • • • NC RECONNECT PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS • • • • •

 BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE	 FORSYTH TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE
 CALDWELL COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND TECHNICAL INSTITUTE	 LENOIR COMMUNITY COLLEGE
 CENTRAL CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE	 PITT COMMUNITY COLLEGE
 DURHAM TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE	 VANCE-GRANVILLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
 FAYETTEVILLE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE	 WILKES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CONVENING LEADERS TO ADVANCE SYSTEM -WIDE CHANGE

Responding to “Converging Crises” in Higher Education

The Belk Center's investment in opportunities that cultivate actionable partnerships is best illustrated by [our annual Dallas Herring Lecture](#). The lecture was offered as a hybrid event for the first time in 2021. It brought together more than 900 registrants, including 80 partners invited to attend in person who represented the State Board of Community Colleges, the UNC System Office, community colleges from within and beyond North Carolina, and myriad other stakeholder groups.

In his keynote address, “Redefining Access: The Power of Proximity,” President Gregory Haile of Broward College called upon executive leaders to leverage their proximity to the communities they serve and connect with prospective students who might otherwise be overlooked. He described how individuals in close proximity to higher education are more likely to know it exists, recognize the value it can bring to their lives, understand the steps necessary to access it, and ultimately see it as an endeavor at which they can be successful.

The Belk Center fostered meaningful engagement among participants during and after the event by providing an [online discussion guide](#), a [video recording](#) of the lecture, and a [booklet](#) containing the keynote transcript to be shared with additional community college stakeholders.



About the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research

With a \$10.5 million grant from the John M. Belk Endowment, the State College of Education established the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research to enhance and strengthen its support of community colleges in the three states.

Provide ongoing leadership development to community college executives

With a \$1.5 million grant from the John M. Belk Endowment, the State College of Education will support the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research to provide professional development opportunities for community college presidents in order to help them strengthen their institution's performance with regard to student success.

Build capacity for evidence-based decision-making and applied research

With a \$1.5 million grant from the John M. Belk Endowment, the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research will support community college leaders in making evidence-based decisions for enhanced institutional performance.

Address the converging crises in higher education

The Community College Leadership doctoral program integrates academic leaders as agents of change who are well prepared to lead and manage the future of higher education. This program provides field-based insights and experiences, field-based leadership opportunities, and extensive research and writing skills. The Belk Center for Community College Leadership will provide support to the Community College Leadership doctoral program including educational mentors, industry partners, and a national advisory board of higher education representation.

Belk Center highlights from 2021 include the following:

Arranging live virtual “Critical Conversations” to create space for leaders to discuss topics like the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education, the role of the college in the community, and the future of higher education.

Establishing the Belk Center for Community College Leadership Learning Lab in partnership with the Aspen Institute’s College Excellence program and Achieving the Dream.

Developing a report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community colleges in North Carolina.

Associating with the National Association of Community College Presidents (NACCP), one focused on strategic finance issues related to the financial health of community colleges across the country.

Introducing the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research to the public through our nearly 75-year-old charge.

Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research

“Fifty years ago, the top quartile of income earners had about 45% of the nation's college graduates. By contrast, only about 6% of their children graduated from college. Today, the top quartile has about 61% of the nation's college graduates, while the bottom quartile has given birth to 42%, while the bottom quartile has gone from about 13% of the nation's college graduates to only 13%.”

Said, perhaps, more drastically, the gap in bachelor's attainment between the top quartile of income earners and the bottom quartile has grown from an already tragic 34%

50 years ago to 49% today.

Colleges Must Account For Who We Are Serving and Who We Are Missing

Remember that young boy from earlier? He went to college, but he is not graduate of a college experience, of the lifelong benefits that will stem therefrom. He simply wants to escape his neighborhood. Regrettably, he once asked his mother, “Why do I have to go to college?” She responded, “Because you're going to college, son, unless you, as a result of remedial education, realize that he has no clue how to study, and you're not going to college because you don't have the money or the time or the proximity or familiarity with the college environment, he is the all too common student who is not college ready, wondering if he belongs.”

We must, therefore, take a hard look at our mission and opportunity, and as one former U.S. president noted, eliminate the soft bigotry of low expectations.

Today, we are faced with the challenge of the College Completion Report, a gap that is growing.

Who are we failing? What are we failing? What are we failing to do? What are we failing to do?

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Reforming Transfer Policy and Practice

Our interest in cultivating strong, mutually-beneficial relationships to advance system-wide change is also manifest in our work with the legislatively-mandated Transfer Advisory Committee (TAC) and the State Higher Education Executive Officers' (SHEEO) Transfer Task Force. After working alongside TAC and other collaborators last year to devise recommendations for transfer policy and practice improvements in North Carolina, the committee was invited to hold their quarterly meetings at the Belk Center.

The proximity of TAC members to Belk Center staff has facilitated stronger communication and reciprocal learning about key transfer issues. As a member of SHEEO's task force, we joined forces with representatives from public and private institutions to articulate and refine recommendations for improving transfer policy and knowledge sharing among system officers and the legislature.

In partnership with state-wide system offices, the Belk Center seeks to ensure broad-based change to the North Carolina transfer system by fostering strong presidential leadership in this area. Using transfer student data to guide decision making, presidents from community colleges and four-year institutions in North Carolina will be convened to develop an equity-focused vision for transfer success. This unique presidential vision will serve as a roadmap for transfer reform throughout the state, amplify promising practices for improving transfer that are already underway, and elevate attention on transfer in regions where it is not currently a priority.

There is much excitement at the Belk Center for Community College Leadership and Research as we celebrate the accomplishments of the past year and look forward to an exciting new chapter that begins this fall. Our future work will continue to engage and support our partners in three important ways.

First, we will provide community college leaders and their teams with the contextualized support they need to champion equitable student success and catalyze change. Second, we will pursue high-impact research that examines what is working, what is not working, and what is yet to be learned—and we will translate our findings into useful tools and resources. Finally, we will build trust and break down silos, enabling stakeholders to develop collaborative solutions to shared challenges. Together with our invaluable network of partners, the Belk Center will pursue excellence in these areas to advance equitable outcomes at all community colleges.

"Central to the mission of the Belk Center is the power of partnership. Anything is possible when we work collaboratively on behalf of our state's community colleges. Together with the System Office and the many partners who share our commitment to the 'Great 58,' we're redefining what's possible for our colleges and the students they serve."

- MC Belk Pilon, President and Board Chair, John M. Belk Endowment

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2021-2022 Annual Report