In thinking about my remarks tonight, I first considered delivering the usual sort of report that I give to most groups—rotary, parents of students, chambers of commerce, and so forth. And this kind of presentation would give our current statistics, the budget environment, new programs that we are launching, etc.

But it occurred to me that, you probably already know all of that data and if you don’t, you can get it pretty easily. What you most likely want from me is a report on UNCP through the lens of the Native American experience—specifically the Lumbee—on our campus. Here’s an overview of my presentation:

[Insert Slide #2]

I’m going to provide a candid analysis of what UNCP is currently doing, and more importantly, what remains to be done—all in terms of the American Indians who live in our community, who work for UNCP, and who are enrolled in the university. So, let’s get started:

[Insert Slide #3]

In most communities where a university is located, there is a little bit of friction between the town and the university. That’s just the natural state of affairs in academia, and our community feels this friction, too. But I’m happy to say that, UNC Pembroke’s relationship with the Town is, in fact, far more positive and productive than what you see many other similar communities.

Several people in this room have had a hand in creating a positive, productive relationship between the campus and the Town of Pembroke. Over the last couple of years, UNC Pembroke has been building collaborations with the Town and continuing to strengthen its relationship with the Lumbee tribe. In this year alone either my senior administrators or I—and often many of us together—have met with officials from the Town of Pembroke every couple of months, or so, to create ways to build up and strengthen our respective communities. Here is a partial list:

[Insert Slide #4]

- During our 125th anniversary of the school’s founding last year, we held almost 50 events on campus—many were in collaboration with the town and tribe.
• We continue to host Town & Gown meetings. Earlier this summer many members of the Pembroke and Lumbee community shared a meal with me and university representatives and discussed our growing partnership.

• We continue to plan events, such as Pembroke Day, in collaboration with representatives from the Town, and support Peace in the Park and Cruising Pembroke.

• And we have begun participating in and cross promoting one another’s events, such as
  - Lumbee Homecoming in the summer,
  - The local Farmers Market
  - Founders’ Day,
  - the Native Food Ways celebration,
  - UNCP’s Homecoming in the fall,
  - the Pembroke Summer Jam, and others.

We look forward to building on the growing relationship in our Town and Gown Committee.

• One initiative that frankly hasn’t worked as I had hoped is the UNCP/Lumbee Tribe Advisory Committee. Chairman Swett and I started this committee in the spring of 2011 and Mr. Brooks, and I reaffirmed its importance upon his election. However, tribal business has diverted attention from this committee. Dr. Olivia Oxendine informs me that we’ve had difficulty maintaining active membership. Therefore, I suggest we revisit the function of this committee and its membership.

In spite of this one disappointment, I believe the university and tribe have many excellent informal relationships that have been very productive.

I want to conclude this section citing an initiative I’m very excited about:

[Insert Slide #5]

The entrepreneurship incubator that has been funded in part by the Department of Commerce, the Golden Leaf Foundation, and some private individuals.

We are confident that this infusion of economic development and community development money and activity in the downtown community will energize the merchant district and will help provide training and resources to emerging entrepreneurs throughout the region.

[Insert Slide #6]
I’m afraid there is a truly unfortunate rumor that rears its head every once in a while. And that is the notion that UNC Pembroke is somehow separating itself from the Native American experience.

I can tell you that, truly, nothing could be more wrong.

Beginning with my installation in 2011 and continuing thereafter, we have incorporated Lumbee symbols and traditions into the most important university ceremonies.

For example, you will be greeted by the Turtle and Medicine Wheel when you enter our new Health Sciences Building. At commencement the Lumbee Ambassadors and a Lumbee flutist lead the processional of our graduates.

[Insert Slide #7]

This has become a very moving event and a signature of UNC Pembroke’s graduation ceremony.

One of my personal goals when arriving at UNC Pembroke was to establish a program dedicated to the study of southeastern American Indians. I’m proud to say that we’ve launched the effort and have named as its first director Dr. Alfred Bryant, who is doing a truly outstanding job heading up that exciting program.

[Insert Slide #8]

But that effort has just begun. My plan from the beginning has been to grow that program into its own school—just like the School of Education, or the School of Business. The School for the Study of Southeast American Indians will become a national resource on the cultural, economic, and social conditions of southeast American Indians. Its ultimate goal is not only to provide information but to apply those findings to improve the quality of life in this region. An example of this kind of research can be seen in the recent project that investigated depression among new mothers in Robeson County. That research was the largest study of American Indians in the eastern United States. And the study took place at UNC Pembroke with our faculty. That’s the kind of research that we can expect through the new SAIS program.

So, imagine with me for a moment: an entire school, within the university, dedicated to studying Native Americans of this whole region of the United States, but located in the heart of Lumbee Country. If that’s not bringing the university’s mission around full circle, I don’t know what is.
But UNC Pembroke’s commitment to Native Americans goes beyond the creation of programs and schools that affirm and support the Native American experience. We are linked to the Tribe and the American Indian experience through our workforce.

32 percent of our faculty, staff, and administrators identify themselves as Lumbee. As these slides show, there are many Native Americans in important, leadership positions throughout the entire university, in addition to those workers who maintain the university grounds, staff our offices, or work in our dining halls. Many have been appointed to their positions during my tenure, as indicated by the asterisk. I, myself, am fortunate to have members of the Lumbee tribe on my cabinet, as senior staff and advisors in my own office.

That said... Are we satisfied?

No.

The truth is, we have one significant weakness: the number of Native American faculty. Currently, 22 out of 300 faculty are Native Americans. We are actively recruiting American Indians, but they are difficult to find and attract. This is a common problem across the country.

There simply are not enough Native Americans—Lumbee and otherwise—who have terminal degrees in their field of study. Annually, fewer than 150 American Indians earn doctorates in all fields of study in the United States—and there are more than 2,750 universities across the country competing for them.

Universities such as UNC Pembroke, in order to be accredited, require full-time faculty to hold a PhD or similar degree in a specific field of study, like history or math or biology. It’s no longer enough to have a master's degree to be a full-time, tenure-track faculty member at UNC Pembroke – or any other accredited university. Unfortunately, for academia, most American Indians who pursue advanced degrees go into law, medicine, or dentistry. They seem to be attracted to the helping professions.

Let me share an example. We've been recruiting new faculty in social work and discovered that, at the most recent count, there are fifteen Native Americans who have a Ph.D. in social work—in the entire United States. In 2010, the number of American Indians with a Ph.D. in English? Four. In 2006 there were three doctorates in chemistry awarded to American Indians. Of the 25,423 doctorates awarded in 2006, 109 were awarded to Native Americans.
So, what can we do to increase the number of Native American faculty in our society? There are a couple of things we can do together. First and foremost, we must encourage all of our children to value education, to graduate from high school and—if they want to teach at a university one day—to go to college.

Unless these basic steps are met, the last step is unattainable. The final step is to counsel students to pursue a career in higher education. Parents, school counselors, and university faculty need to work on this together. For example, UNC Pembroke is beginning to ramp up its summer camp offerings for local students. We anticipate exciting academic camps where middle school and high school students will interact with our faculty and experience the joys of learning, teaching, and research. We hope to kindle a spark of interest that can be nurtured by all of us to create a passion for a life in academia.

In addition, the university is exploring a “grow your own program:” where we would sponsor individual(s) for their doctorate in a field of study where the university has need: e.g. biology, math, or anthropology. Once they completed their Ph.D. they would return to UNC Pembroke in a tenure-earning position, but must agree to remain for a period of time related to the length of their sponsorship. This is an expensive program, at least $50,000 a year salary plus tuition and fees. It is difficult to begin a program like this when we are laying off people, but we are seriously considering it.

Finally, we can recruit American Indian faculty away from other institutions. This approach is also very costly. American Indian faculty, because of the law of supply and demand, often command a higher salary. It’s difficult to justify paying someone in the same department 30% to 50% more, unless it is for an endowed chair or professor, which is a position that is funded in part through an endowment established by private individuals or corporations. We have currently raised more than 50% of our goal to establish an endowed professorship in American Indian Studies. This professorship will likely command a salary of >$130,000, where the average salary of a professor is about $70,000.

So, that is the challenge before us. Increasing the number of American Indians on our faculty will be incremental and will require considerable time. However, we are committed to the quest.

I would now like to shift to enrollment. Ever since I have been Chancellor, I have been asked the question, “When are you going to increase the number of American Indians at UNCP?”

*These data were added subsequent to the original speech.
That’s a valid question, but the answer is similar to increasing American Indian faculty. Let me show you some data to help you understand.

[Insert Slide #11]

Let’s start by looking at the enrollment patterns over the decade.

[Insert Slide #12]

As you can see, the number of American Indians enrolled at UNCP has remained relatively constant over the last decade or so, averaging somewhere between 1,000 and 1,100 per year.

You’ll also notice a big drop in UNCP’s enrollment in 2011 when we lost approximately 10% of our total enrollment and a similar amount of American Indian students. This drop was brought on by the economy and by the loss of financial aid. Too many students were failing to make satisfactory academic progress and became ineligible for financial aid. This is one reason why we’ve been so focused on increasing standards.

But now let me put the enrollment of American Indians at UNC Pembroke into its proper perspective. UNCP remains a powerhouse of Native American students. Nearly half of all Native Americans in college in North Carolina attend UNC Pembroke.

[Insert Slide #13]

When we compare ourselves nationally, we fare very well as shown by this slide:

[Insert Slide #14]

But let’s return to the question, “How do we increase the number of American Indians attending UNC Pembroke?”

First, we need to increase the number of Native Americans in North Carolina graduating high school by keeping them in school. As this graph shows, American Indian students are more likely to drop out. The good news is the gap is closing.

[Insert Slide #15]

But here is the bigger problem, the number who graduate annually is small because of the size of the population.
Of the American Indian students who graduate, roughly 40% are likely to apply to college. That means in 2012 only 520 students were available to all colleges in North Carolina and the nation.

In 2012, UNC Pembroke’s freshman class included 162 American Indian students, that’s about 30% of the total pool.

It’s true, UNCP enrolled more American Indians in its freshman class earlier in the decade, but at that time our admissions standards were similar to a community college. Essentially students had to have a 2.0 high school GPA and a diploma. We found that many of our students—regardless of race—did not persist when admitted under these criteria.

Their academic preparation was not sufficient to handle the college curriculum. To complicate matters, the UNC System—under the direction of the general assembly—prohibited UNC schools from providing remedial education because community colleges were funded for this purpose and universities were not.

Beginning in 2009, Chancellor Jenkins starting modifying our admissions standards to better match student preparation with their ability to succeed. I have continued that effort. Now, all schools in the UNC system are required to have minimum admissions standards: a H.S. GPA of 2.5 and a scholastic aptitude test score (that’s the SAT you’ve heard about) of 800.9

As of fall 2013, UNCP is above the minimum requirement: a high school GPA of 2.7 and an SAT of 840. We plan to remain there for the foreseeable future because we are seeing better student performance and persistence.

Although we aren’t admitting as many American Indians in our freshman class as we did five years ago, many are enrolling later as transfer students—from community colleges. And whenever we deny admission to any student because they lack the academic credentials, we give them a strategy—this is a little instruction booklet, basically—to follow to go to a community college and then transfer back to UNC Pembroke. This strategy has enabled us to offset the slight decrease of American Indians in our freshman class, and it’s a strategy that has worked for years in other schools. More than one out of five Native Americans who earned a doctorate between 1995 and 1999 reported having attended a two-year school at some time in their college career.10 *

*These data were added subsequent to the original speech.
To grow our Native American enrollment we could recruit outside the state—and we do. However, out of state tuition is four times the rate of in-state tuition, so it is hard to attract students without scholarship support. I have proposed to the UNC system each year I’ve been here to allow non-resident American Indians attend at resident rates—but the proposal has not made it on the to the legislative agenda because it would be an additional budget item—and as we all know, legislators tend to dislike new budget items. But we’ll keep trying because that change would give us access to American Indians across the country.

So, in a very real sense, our recruitment presently is limited to in-state students. Here we are challenged because there are so few graduates; and concurrently, there are too many Native American students who do not meet the minimum standards for admission at UNC Pembroke or any other UNC school.

You may recall in a recent Robesonian article that SAT scores had dropped across Robeson county. Sadly, half the students graduating from Purnell Swett who took the SAT scored below the minimum UNC admissions requirement. I find this to be so disheartening.

The right approach ethically and academically was to raise the standards so that the students who are strong enough academically to get accepted are strong enough academically to succeed and finish their degree. I hope you agree that this approach is fairer to students.

[Insert Slide #18]

So, what can we do? We are investigating how UNCP can partner with the public schools of Robeson County to make a difference.

Dr. Zoe Locklear is now leading an effort on our part to assist. With Dr. Johnny Hunt’s concurrence, Dr. Locklear is working jointly with assistant superintendents to explore strategies to encourage college readiness and persistence. Further, we believe the university can become more involved in encouraging students to stay in school and get a college degree. I will be going to multiple high schools later this month throughout the county to do just that.

We are investigating restoring SAT prep courses on our campus and creating more summer camps for kids that will focus not only on athletics but also academics. The more we can get kids on our campus, the more likely they will want to be a college student.

We will continue to offer the College Opportunity Program that helps those kids right on the edge of getting in to UNCP, and we have set up perhaps a half-dozen or more programs
to provide academic support throughout their college career to keep students on track to graduate.

[Insert Slide #19]

As I mentioned before, for those students who are not admitted, we have developed partnerships with community colleges to create pathways from the community college to UNCP. It’s working. Now, about half of our student population transferred in from another school or community college.

But at the end of the day, we would love to see more Native American students graduating from the area’s high schools, applying to and being accepted by UNC Pembroke, and then staying on track and in school to complete their degree – perhaps with scholarship support to keep them enrolled consistently so that they graduate on time.

Only then can we think about launching these students into graduate school and doctoral programs so that they, one day, can return to our area—or go to another university—and be faculty those members, representing the Native American community they came from.

[Insert Slide #20]

“But I believe there is reason to be hopeful. If UNC Pembroke remains true to the original mission of the school—to provide a pathway for success through education—we will cultivate Lumbee students from the baccalaureate to beyond. Together we can grow students who are capable of achieving the very highest academic credentials and representing—at universities or in other arenas—their Native American heritage.

I hope you’ll join me and the rest of the UNC Pembroke community on this journey.
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