



Campus Commons Engagement Committee Final Report

March 30, 2016

Purpose

In October 2015, UNC President Kay Norton convened the Campus Commons Engagement Committee to assist in collecting feedback to inform the design of the Commons and ensure that it reflects UNC's identity and values. This report documents the Committee's findings. The President's charge is included as [Attachment 1](#).

Campus Commons Engagement Committee Members

Bereket Abera, Student Body President
Michael Alexander, School of Music Director
Talia Carroll, Marcus Garvey Cultural Center Director
Jay Dinges, University Center Director
Scott Douglas, Assistant Professor of Sport and Exercise Science
David Grapes, School of Theatre Arts and Dance Director
Tobias Guzmán, Enrollment Management and Student Access AVP
Nate Haas, Media Relations Director
Geri Landwehr, Bursar
Kirk Lechlitter, Facilities Management AVP
Andrew Liccardo, School of Art and Design Director
Elizabeth Mahoney, Professional Administrative Staff Council Chair
Sherilyn Marrow, Professor of Communication
Alison Merrill, Faculty Senate Chair
Brandon Miller, Student Trustee
David Pringle, Professor of Chemistry, Committee Co-chair
Helen Reed, Dean of Libraries
Gloria Reynolds, Special Assistant to the President
Katrina Rodriguez, Dean of Students and Student Engagement AVP
Marlene Schuman, Classified Staff Council Chair
Stephanie Torrez, Academic Support Assistant Dean
Robbyn Wacker, Provost and Sr. Vice President
Dan Weaver, University and External Relations VP, Committee Co-chair
Wayne Webster, Development and Alumni Relations VP
Leo Welch, College of Performing and Visual Arts Dean
Phillip Wyperd, Institutional Systems and Architecture Director

Background

UNC is building the Campus Commons to provide an integrated support hub for students, a showcase for the university's world-class arts programs, and a portal to welcome and educate visitors about UNC. This addresses three critical concerns. (1) Student support functions are now spread around campus so students have to figure out what type of assistance they need, determine which office provides it, and go back and forth among several offices to take care of complex issues. (2) Practice and performance spaces for arts students do not reflect the academic quality of UNC's world-renowned programs, creating a competitive disadvantage for the university and its graduates. (3) Because UNC does not have a gateway building, it does not have an opportunity to welcome visitors and educate them about the university.

The Commons will be built adjacent to the University Center, to the southeast, and will complement the functions in the UC. By bringing together a variety of functions and operating in concert with the UC, the Commons will also encourage collaboration and synergies that are difficult to foster in separate spaces.

The \$74-million project will be funded with state capital funds, private donor gifts, and bonds supported by a student capital fee. The portion of the student capital fee used for the Commons will be \$160 per year for a full-time student. To make the case for state funding, in 2014, a steering committee of students, faculty and staff developed the Campus Commons Program Plan, which identified the building's functions and occupants. To improve UNC's prospects for state funding, the Program Plan proposed building the Commons in two phases. In the spring of 2015, the state agreed to provide \$23 million for Phase 1. Currently, UNC's request for \$15 million for Phase 2 is being considered; the Capital Development Committee and Joint Budget Committee have recommended approval, but the state budget will not be finalized until late spring. Fundraising for the Commons is also well under way. UNC announced reaching the \$4-million milestone in January 2016, representing one-third of the Commons fundraising goal. Efforts to engage alumni and donors to build support for the Commons include ads in the university magazine and monthly electronic newsletter, which reach an audience of more than 100,000, and a March 2 telephone "town hall" joined by 1,200 of the 10,000 people invited.

With the approval of Phase 1 funding, UNC hired architects and contractors to begin developing a building plan. Their work began in the fall of 2015 and led to the convening of the Campus Commons Engagement Committee to assist in collecting input to inform the design of the Commons. UNC plans to break ground for Phase 1 in the fall of 2016, and if Phase 2 funding is approved this spring, the entire building should be complete by the end of 2018.

Further details about the Commons are addressed in the Frequently Asked Questions included as [Attachment 2](#).

Communication and Data Collection Methods

Early in its work, the Committee identified the need to better inform campus and community members about the Commons to support the feedback collection process. Communication efforts included hosting a February 16 open house for campus and community members to talk with project architects and Committee members, updating a Frequently Asked Questions document, and developing a video to explain in-progress drawings of the Commons.

The Committee solicited feedback from campus and the community for approximately four weeks in February and March. The primary avenues for feedback were an online survey, student focus groups, and “graffiti boards” placed strategically around campus.

Campus Commons Survey

The survey, which was accessed via a link on the Campus Commons website, solicited feedback about the common areas in the Commons—the indoor lobby spaces, the “front porch” at the south entrance to the Commons, and the “quad” between the University Center and the Commons, which will also be its north entrance. Questions addressed both aesthetics and functions of the common areas, including topics such as potential uses for spaces, furniture, amenities and landscaping.

The survey was developed in Qualtrics to standardize data collection and reporting. Survey-takers were asked if they were student, staff, faculty, alumnus or community member, but no further demographic information was requested. Responses totaled 549. Sixty percent of respondents were students, 23 percent were staff or administrators, 7 percent were alumni, 6 percent were faculty, and 4 percent identified themselves as belonging to another group such as parents, community members or multiple groups listed.

A full report on the survey results is provided in [Attachment 3](#). Generally speaking, respondents agreed that furnishings in the lobby areas should be primarily soft upholstered furniture and tables and chairs. They also considered electrical outlets and Wi-Fi extremely important in the lobby areas. For the quad and front porch areas, respondents considered both seatwalls and tables and chairs important, with a preference for somewhat more tables and chairs. Respondents would like to see both sunny and shady areas in the two outdoor spaces, with preferences leaning slightly toward more sunny spaces. Respondents also considered both landscaping and hardscaping important for the outdoor areas, with overall responses suggesting a preference for more landscaping at the quad and more hardscaping at the front porch.

Student Focus Groups

The stated objective of the focus groups was to identify design concepts, aesthetics and amenities that will draw students to the Commons and motivate them to return. To protect students and to ensure consistency in data collection, focus groups were hosted by trained facilitators. Questions were designed to delve into a greater level of detail than the survey or graffiti boards. Facilitators explained to participants that questions were “intended to elicit rich descriptions of how you would like to experience the campus and the Campus Commons both individually and as a community of students.”

To maximize participation, facilitators joined student groups during their regularly scheduled meetings. There were eight focus groups, totaling approximately 100 participants. Focus groups were conducted with students representing the following areas:

- National Residence Hall Honorary
- Student staff from the Cultural Centers
- Greek Life
- Disability Support Services
- Student Activities
- Student Athlete Advisory Council
- Residence Hall Association
- Center for International Education

Students readily envisioned the Commons as a place for a breadth of student-focused activity, emphasizing both studying and entertainment. They are looking for cozy spots that are somewhat removed from the action as well as open spaces to gather with friends. These preferences were also reflected in discussions about furnishings. For example, sofas, large tables for group study, and tables and chairs at a variety of heights were commonly suggested. Similarly, while there was great enthusiasm for soft, natural lighting, students also want the option to have more light for studying; some suggested reading lamps in study areas to address this. In half of the focus groups, students also raised the issue of needing a place to nap without returning to their residence hall or leaving campus.

In discussions of amenities, electrical outlets, Wi-Fi and charging stations were repeatedly noted as extremely important. There were also numerous discussions about food; in half of the focus groups, there were specific mentions of healthy food. Students expressed an interest in having a variety of inexpensive food available well into the evening.

Graffiti Boards

Graffiti boards were used to collect input to inform displays that will be developed for the common areas of the Commons. Campus and community members were invited to write comments on graffiti boards around campus. Boards were placed at the February 16 open house, for one week at Kepner, Gunter, Frasier, Ross, Tobey-Kendel, Holmes and the Campus Rec Center, and for two weeks at the University Center and Michener Library.

The boards asked the following questions, which were designed to collect input regardless of respondents' knowledge about the Commons:

- What unique things about UNC should we celebrate? What are the best things about UNC? What do you love about UNC?
- What makes Greeley important to UNC? What's your favorite thing about Greeley? How do UNC and Greeley work together?
- What exemplifies UNC's academic heritage and excellence? What is UNC's impact on the world?
- As a UNC community, we are...

The quality and dedication of UNC's faculty was a common theme on several boards. To describe UNC as a community, the words "diverse" and "united" were used several times. A list of comments from the graffiti boards is included as [Attachment 5](#).

Conclusion

The Committee's charge included the following questions:

- How do we ensure that the Commons engages students?
- How do we make the Commons reflect the things that identify us as a UNC community?
- How do we celebrate UNC's academic heritage and achievements?
- How do we make the Commons feel like our home, and what good things about Greeley do we want the Commons to reflect?

We used these four broad questions as the foundation for designing an array of targeted questions to collect actionable feedback through an online survey, focus groups and graffiti boards.

The results from the student focus groups, in particular, speak to how to ensure that the Commons engages students. How the Commons can reflect our identity as a university community is addressed in

responses from the focus groups, graffiti boards, and answers to survey questions about uses for the commons areas in the Commons. There was tremendous emphasis on the fact that the Commons must be welcoming for *all* members of UNC's diverse community. Many ideas about exemplifying academic heritage and achievements focused on the accomplishments of students, alumni and professors, suggesting that UNC's achievements may best be conveyed by highlighting the achievements of university community members. Finally, feedback about connections between the university and the community highlighted the personal character of Greeley community, which was often associated with its size, as well as the arts and events in areas around UNC, such as downtown and the creative district.