



Chancellor Thorp's Annual Retreat

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Chancellor Thorp held his annual retreat last Wednesday for his campus leadership team. It is an opportunity for deans, vice chancellors, and others to get beyond our day-to-day work and think about bigger picture issues facing the University. Here is a selective overview

Holden began the day with an overview that included everything from the academic qualifications of the incoming freshman class (highest ever) to football. Carolina will become a more tuition-based university in the future, and it is hard to see how that can be avoided. Our research funding increased last year as a campus, notwithstanding the loss of federal stimulus money, and our private giving was the highest (\$277 million) since the final year of the Carolina First Campaign. Holden did not talk about the details of our football woes, though he did note that many of our peers are facing similar problems and we are part of a national conversation about college athletics. I recognize that people have different views about the football controversy at Carolina. Whatever your views, I know Holden to be a good person who loves the University and is working hard to do the right thing, and I hate that it has consumed him for so long.

President Dick Brodhead from Duke University gave a talk on the importance of humanities in higher education. Other countries envy our liberal arts education because it develops the mental habit of connecting things, which allows people to integrate different bodies of knowledge. The humanities are losing out to science partly because faculty members have focused on narrower and more opaque issues. Broadhead decried the lack of a strategy for communicating the value of humanities education, but unfortunately he did not offer much of one himself.



Another session was with Chancellor Randy Woodson, who talked about NC State's plans and collaborations. For several years NC State has been growing the number of their undergraduate students, and it has created real challenges because they have not had a corresponding increase in faculty members. He wants to change that trend and focus instead on graduate education and increasing their research profile. Woodson was down-to-earth and impressively candid about the need to grow their endowment and the challenging legislative climate toward higher education. He seems like a great choice for NC State and a supportive partner for Carolina.

The last session of the day was with Professor Charlie Clotfelter with the Sanford School of Public Policy, who has just published a book called [Big-Time Sports in American Universities](#). We read the book for the retreat and I strongly recommend it if you are interested in the general topic. Clotfelter makes a number of interesting points about the range of costs associated with big-time sports, which means football and basketball. He also highlights some of the benefits. I came away persuaded that it will be hard for universities to avoid serious problems over time until they are prepared to publicly embrace that the entertainment business has become a major part of their mission. For example, Clotfelter points out how almost none of the major universities mention athletics in their mission statements. At the same time, however, there is an enormous amount of time, money, and publicity connected with their big-time athletic programs. Notwithstanding the current athletic controversies on many campuses, he was not at all optimistic about future changes.

