



## Orientation for President Spellings

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We had the opportunity last week to participate in Carolina's orientation for new UNC System President Margaret Spellings. The visit was part of her commitment to visit all of the UNC System campuses during her first 100 days in office. I think we successfully introduced her to the School.

A few weeks ago we were invited to put forward several different activities of the School's public service to North Carolina that we might feature. The organizers selected our work with the court system and judicial officials through the North Carolina Judicial College. Time was tight as we



shared a 50-minute session with the Carolina Performing Arts Program (Director Emil Kang), the Friday Center's online degree path for the military (Director Rob Bruce), and the School of Medicine's Physician Assistant Degree Program for returning military veterans (Director Dr. Paul Chelminski).

I started with a quick overview of the School's mission—emphasizing our focus on North Carolina and public officials. My experience is that a person hearing about us for the first time has difficulty getting their head around the fact that public officials truly are the School's primary focus and not a marginal activity. There is a natural and understandable tendency to compare us with schools like the Kennedy School or the LBJ School, which unfortunately is misleading. My experience also is that a person needs to be exposed to information about the School multiple times before they truly understand and internalize our distinctive mission. I feel like we made a very good start with President Spellings.



Jessie Smith offered a brilliantly concise explanation of her work with legislators and with court officials. She talked about her teaching, writing, and advising. In particular, Jessie explained her work on changing the age of when a person is treated as a juvenile rather than as an adult in our court system. She is doing that work as a reporter for a committee of Chief Justice Martin's Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice. I thought the example communicated



beautifully to President Spellings how our impact is increased by the special relationship that our faculty members have as trusted partners with court officials, legislators, and other public officials. It also illustrated that we are not the ones initiating proposed policy changes. One of my favorite moments was when Jessie pulled a copy of *North Carolina Crimes* out of her bag and used it to explain how our research and writing has an impact.

The third person sharing our block of time was Judge William Webb, a retired federal magistrate for eastern North Carolina and a member of the UNC Board of Governors. Judge Webb knows about our work because he chairs the Committee on Criminal Investigation and Adjudication that Jessie is staffing, and because he also participated in a presentation on open meetings made by Frayda Bluestein and Bob Joyce to the Board of Governors. It always is more compelling and credible to have someone from outside the School talk about the quality and impact of our work. Judge Webb has come to appreciate the value of the School and he conveyed to President Spellings the importance of our work and how we are distinctive to North Carolina. It was impressive to me that he was willing to take so much time out of his busy schedule to speak for a few minutes about the School.





President Spellings, Jessie Smith, Mike Smith, Judge Webb, Chancellor Folt

Not surprisingly, there was very little time for questions. President Spellings did ask about our work with regular students. I mentioned our very fine MPA Program, but I also said that our primary focus is North Carolina public officials. I loved the fact that Chancellor Folt jumped in to emphasize the distinctiveness of our work with public officials and its importance for North Carolina. One reason I loved Chancellor Folt's comment is that she had asked a similar question about students when she visited the School as a part of her own orientation, and her comment illustrates how much her understanding and appreciation for our work with officials has evolved.

Another unexpected moment was when Dr. Chelminski indicated that the School of Government's impact on North Carolina was one of his inspirations for creating the Physician Assistant degree program. Nice.

The orientation session was my third opportunity to interact with President Spellings. I have found her to be direct, engaging, and without pretense. She also has a nice sense of humor, which will serve her well. Many people are unhappy about how Tom Ross was treated and the process used for hiring President Spellings. I understand that very well. She is not responsible for those things, however, though some of the unhappiness about them continues to be projected onto her. Others have pointed to various things in her background as reasons to oppose her selection as president. My perspective about President Spellings is that we need her to be successful and that she deserves the benefit of the doubt moving forward. I am hopeful about the future. I have invited President Spellings to learn more about the School of Government and she has indicated an interest in doing it.

Special thanks to Jen Willis, Jeff Welty, Gini Hamilton, and Sonja Matanovic for helping us think about our session and for compiling information for it.