

**Topic Title: 49er Commitment to Community or
49er Community Engagement Pledge**

Brief Description of the Topic: There have been several examples across the country of student groups and institutions encouraging students to take Graduation Pledges, which in some ways may parallel Honor Codes, and other pledges emphasize environmental responsibility: <http://www.graduationpledge.org>, <http://www.colorado.edu/studentgroups/scc/graduationpledge.html>. UNC-W and Appalachian have one as well. Given the expanding interests of our students to serve their community, the Crossroads Project, the university's recognition through the Carnegie community service award, membership in NC Campus Compact, and the growing need for students to think beyond themselves, this could be a timely endeavor to raise attention towards. One of the aspects related to this concept that we see in the Career Center, is a growing concern among profit and nonprofit employers that college interns graduates do not understand how what they do relates to others and affects others.

Our employers describe students as bright and creative, but often indicate lack the ability to translate ideas and projects to full meaningful integration because of the lack of sensitivity to others and to community (i.e., this is not just a communication skills issue); this would be a targeted learning outcome. The concern goes beyond the need for teamwork skills to the heart of professionalism, citizenship, sense of purpose, leadership, and interpersonal skills. Recent studies also indicate the results of a proliferation of non-personal approaches of some technologies and social media in our society have also raised these gaps in students learning, awareness, and experience.

In addition to intentionally enriching this learning, a community engagement pledge could heighten the awareness for all undergraduate students coming into college with transition issues and perhaps even engagement and retention issues if they were asked to look at :

- 1) what community they are part of coming into college (i.e., even family)and what that means,
- 2) and then are required to look at sense of self related to community on the campus and
- 3) then required to identify at least one other community they are becoming a part of (i.e. identification with one's major, internship employer, student organization) before they graduate.

Their roles, responsibilities, and intentional learning as well as impact on their lives personally could be addressed in this pledge. The point at which this is introduced to students, how a variety of learning goals are established, and how it is monitored would be developed through the proposal stage, but initial discussions led to the belief that this could be integrated into a many things already happening on campus rather than requiring the startup of a new program.

The learning that students would engage in is both internal and external- about self and about how they relate to those around them, perhaps providing students with a greater sense of purpose. The value to UNC Charlotte would be three-fold :

- 1) provides a unique identifying community pledge as an urban institution
- 2) assists students with developing perhaps a better sense of self and meaning, thus increasing the chances of supporting University retention and graduation efforts
- 3) the institution would be known for producing graduates who are not only bright and have a strong work ethic, but also have a sense of an organization beyond themselves- a sense of community that expands the notion of citizenship.