August 31, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Board of Governors

FROM: Tom Ross

SUBJECT: Implementation of the recommendations of the UNC Task Force on Athletics and Academics

At your August 2011 Board meeting, Chancellor Steve Ballard outlined the recommendations of the UNC Task Force on Athletics and Academics, which I appointed in January 2011 and which he chaired. Since that time, I have sought feedback and additional input from our chancellors and athletic directors and have discussed with others the recommendations included in the report. After weighing all the input received – some of which varied from the recommendations - I have concluded that the integrity of our academic enterprise is best served by implementing all of the Task Force recommendations. I have provided below for your information a summary of the recommendations and action steps that have been or will be taken to implement them. I am deeply appreciative of the work done by Chancellor Ballard and the other members of the Task Force.

A. Summary Recommendations from the Task Force

1. Integration of Athletics Programs with the Academic Enterprise

The Task Force recommended frequent communication with institutional Boards of Trustees and regular public discussions on the topic of athletics. It further recommended the inclusion of athletics leaders in the campus’s executive leadership team, the need for athletic compliance offices to report to an individual or office outside of the department of athletics, and the need for academic support services and tutoring for student-athletes to be under the auspices of Academic Affairs.

Since our campuses have different reporting structures, the athletic directors recommended that the reporting lines for compliance offices and academic
support services be left to the discretion of each campus. After giving their advice considerable thought, I have chosen to concur with the Task Force and will require that the chancellors report to me by December 31, 2012, on the steps they have taken to ensure that the Compliance Office reports to the chancellor (or the chancellor’s non-athletics department designee) and that academic support services and tutoring are placed under the purview and responsibility of Academic Affairs or another appropriate unit outside the athletic department.

2. System Oversight and Monitoring

(a) Early Warning Toolkit: The Task Force recognized that the NCAA’s FLAG program (Facilitating Learning and Achieving Graduation) is a potential external resource that could aid institutions as they work to mitigate any academic risks of student-athletes. FLAG is a prototype program now under development by the NCAA specifically for use by NCAA Division I schools. FLAG will provide participating institutions with tools to help increase the efficiency of their current services (including academic support and life-skills programs) and to make informed decisions regarding recruiting, admissions, and program resources (e.g., staffing and budget). When fully implemented, the FLAG program will provide three modules: i). assessing individual student-athlete risk; ii). assigning suggested support services, based on the student-athlete’s specific risk factors; and, iii). evaluating the overall effectiveness of the institution’s student-athlete support services.

While our Division I schools may choose to use the FLAG program when it is fully developed, all UNC campuses—regardless of classification—must take appropriate measures to have in place an “early warning toolkit” to monitor class attendance, participation in tutorials and study halls, grades on class assignments, and other measures that assess performance of student-athletes in the classroom. Chancellors will also be directed to report to me on steps taken to assure these measures are in place as part of their December 2012 submissions.

(b) Academic Integrity Review: The Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) requires periodic integrity reviews for all member schools, and the Task Force recommended that non-ACC schools undergo similar reviews. I have accepted this recommendation and have asked Vice President Bruce Mallette to propose a format to be followed by the campuses in executing integrity reviews.

As a condition of providing campuses the option to accept advertising for the North Carolina Education Lottery at athletic venues, I have required that 5% of the net proceeds from any lottery advertising contracts be forwarded to General Administration to be used to help offset the costs of these reviews.

(c) Board of Governors Review of Athletics: The Task Force recommended that the Board of Governors review annually a report from the President on the progress of
each institution in promoting academic success (such as the APR) and the academic integrity of its athletics programs. The first report would be due in February 2013.

I agree with this recommendation and will ensure this report is provided to you.

(d) General Administration Involvement: The Task Force observed that regular discussions with the chancellors and provosts could heighten the awareness of potential risks and help disseminate best practices across the system. Additionally, it recommended regular meetings and discussions among UNC system athletics directors, including ongoing discussions on academic integrity.

I support these recommendations and will lead regular discussions of athletics issues at the meetings of the chancellors. In addition, Senior Vice President Ortega will lead regular discussions at meetings of the provosts and I will ask Dr. Mallette to convene, at minimum, an annual meeting of athletics directors, possibly attended by others as needed. Additionally, Dr. Mallette will work with the athletic directors to identify other groups, such as the directors of academic support programs, who could benefit from regular interaction and the sharing of best practices.

(e) Expectations for Coaches: The Task Force recommended consideration of guidelines for coaches’ contracts that address the coaches’ responsibility for appropriate team academic performance measures and accountability for violations of academic integrity.

As you know, I appointed a Committee on Best Practices for Head Coach and Athletics Director Contracts, which has now submitted a set of recommendations. That report is attached and included by reference in this memorandum. I agree with these recommendations and intend to implement them.

3. Funding

The Task Force recommended that critical support areas, such as academic services and compliance, have the opportunity to make their needs for appropriate levels of funding known during campus resource allocation processes. It further recommended that the President and Board of Governors work to ensure that appropriate resources are made available.

While I agree with these recommendations in principle, I would also note that all campuses that have athletics programs must consider such costs an integral part of operating those programs. As mentioned earlier, I have already pledged a portion of net proceeds from lottery advertising contracts to support athletic integrity reviews in Recommendation A.2.c.
B. Primary Risks and Control Strategies Identified by the Task Force

In addition to the summary recommendations outlined above, the Task Force report identified other specific risks, as well as strategies for helping to address those risks. I support the recommendations of the Task Force as summarized below. It should be noted that the NCAA certification and self-study process (discussed in numbers 5 and 6 below) is being reformed by the NCAA.

1. The chancellor must be aware of the process for admitting at-risk student-athletes and be an active participant in the admission of exceptions.

   Board policy now requires that the campus process resulting in an exception include faculty participation, with the final authorization made by the chancellor. Dr. Ortega’s “Academics First Workgroup” will soon recommend language to clarify the definition of “exception.”

2. Campuses should track the academic progress of all student-athletes (and non-student-athletes) who are admitted as exceptions beyond their freshman year in order to determine if the institution is being successful at retaining and graduating such students.

3. Campuses should conduct an analysis of each individual athletic team to determine which teams are admitting the largest percentage of student-athletes who are academically less prepared. If the academic record of a team is not consistent with the standards on that campus (e.g., lower retention rates, inadequate progress towards degree, etc.), then those teams should be given less flexibility during the admissions process than those teams that have demonstrated a track record of appropriately supporting that group of student-athletes.

4. Coaches and athletics departments should be held accountable for ensuring that full evaluations are conducted of the prospective student-athletes they recruit. In cases where a prospective student-athlete has previously experienced behavioral problems or academic issues, involvement of faculty and academic support personnel is recommended during on-campus visits.

5. All UNC institutions should strive to have all athletics academic support units achieve Program Certification from the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A). Additionally, academic support units should have faculty advisory committees.

6. All institutions are capable of having their lead athletics academic staff member achieve Individual N4A Professional Certification. All campuses already have a regular NCAA self-study requirement, and that should serve as the foundation for
the review. The N4A certification is a supplemental review that has merit and should be completed.

7. Student-athletes who have exhausted their athletic eligibility, chosen to leave the team, or been injured should receive the same set of academic support services as provided to eligible and competing student-athletes.

8. All coaches should be held accountable for the academic success of their student-athletes and understand that they are instrumental in the academic success of student-athletes.

9. Regular open discussions about ethical standards should be held with individuals who work with student-athletes. Codes of conduct must be discussed with all student-athletes during the orientation period and periodically thereafter.

10. The recruitment of both full-time and part-time academic support staff should include a careful screening process to ensure that people with the highest level of integrity are hired. Individuals providing tutorial support to student-athletes should go through a training session prior to the first tutoring session and should receive continued training throughout their employment. Academic support professionals must be trained on the NCAA progress-toward-degree requirements and all relevant academic legislation. All staff who have significant contact with student-athletes—including tutors, facility monitors, mentors, and many others—must sign a pledge that they will comply with all NCAA rules, report all possible violations, and ensure that a student-athlete’s work is his/her own.

11. Additionally, as a means to constructively evaluate and improve academic support programs, campuses must seek feedback to provide to tutors and academic support program staff from student-athletes, coaches with whom there is working contact, faculty with whom there is working contact, and the academic support administrator to whom the staff member reports.

12. Chancellors must ensure that there is a compliance and infraction investigation and reporting structure for which a senior administrator outside of the department of athletics is accountable.

I believe that the steps we have taken and continue to take in response to the recommendations of the Task Force on Athletics and Academics will help strengthen the oversight of athletics and improve the academic support provided to student-athletes. I am confident that our institutions will benefit from implementing the recommendations outlined above and from sharing identified best practices. I appreciate your attention to these matters and your support of these efforts.