

Fouad Abd-El-Khalick
UNC–Chapel Hill
Remarks
April 26, 2016 (1:00–2:00 PM)

Good afternoon.

Thank you Chancellor Folt and Provost Dean for your kind words. Thank you all for coming out to this event during this very busy time of the semester.

Lama, Kareem, Farrah, and I are incredibly excited about joining The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the community. The topography, weather, and beauty here are very similar to our native Lebanon. Driving around Chapel Hill we could not stop smiling.

In trying to sweeten the deal for our 8-year old son — who currently is at school — to consider the move, we had to have a father-son talk; the sort you have once or twice in a lifetime. I said, “Kareem, when we move to North Carolina, I promise that I will take you to as many basketball games as possible, because, you see, those Tar Heels down in Chapel Hill . . . they actually win!” . . . Of course, the extent to which this remark is funny is directly proportional to one’s familiarity with the Illini basketball track record.

In all seriousness: Education matters; lifelong, lifewide.

A school of education matters.

A School of Education at the flagship public university of North Carolina, one of the finest institutions of higher education in the nation, indeed, around the globe, bears remarkable responsibilities to a multitude of stakeholders. P-12 education has been, and will continue to be, core business for us. But a school of education has a lot to offer, and should work very hard to make itself relevant, to all disciplines in higher education, as well as any setting — be it formal, informal, corporate, or not-for-profit; be it face-to-face, online, or in some hybrid format — where the aim is to develop among learners of any age or level of expertise some set of meaningful and lasting understandings, skills, attitudes, or habits of mind.

Serving as dean provides a unique opportunity to work alongside a large group of talented and committed faculty, staff, students, alumni, and leaders both within the School of Education and across the UNC-Chapel Hill campus, and beyond, to address educational issues that are of critical importance to the well-being of the state, nation, and the globe.

Like our peer schools and colleges of education across the nation, we are facing a number of very difficult challenges. Clearly, I could spend a whole lot of time talking about these. Here I will sample only a few.

- There have been sizable and consistent decreases in the number of young people who are aspiring to become teachers and work in our P-12 schools, especially schools in the most underprivileged and under-resourced of our communities. We need to win those young people back into the ranks of the teaching profession.
- We need to work hard toward creative and visionary alignment between our formal P-20 education systems and informal learning settings with the rapidly changing nature of work and expertise in the 21st century, as well as the changing nature of knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption, especially in the STEM and health fields. All this is particularly relevant in light of the rapidly advancing and digitally intensive realities that have, and continue to transform our daily lives and the globe. This alignment will entail no less than substantially transforming our current learning goals and domains, as well as curricula, pedagogies, and policies.
- We also need to work toward equity in terms of access and outcomes for all students across all educational levels, with a particular attention to the most vulnerable of our children and young adults, as well as communities. All this entails deep engagement with cutting-edge research, knowledge production, development, and service.

As vexing as these problems are, we need to remain focused and optimistic. I know I am. I am very excited about, and very hopeful that, we will be able to work together to attract new talent, and draw on the enormous talent in the School of Education and across the UNC-Chapel Hill campus and the Research Triangle, as well as seek any and all available resources at the local, state, and federal levels to make headway on some of these critical challenges through building robust partnerships, producing innovations that are uniquely Carolina, and engaging in creative and entrepreneurial leadership across various domains.

Come July 1st, you will most likely find me at your door. That's what I do. I do not send emails. I'm just going to walk to you, knock on your door. I'll be asking for help. I'll be seeking guidance. Or, I'll be looking for collaboration, and I will drag you into some sort of collaboration that's going to be fun, but challenging. I promise that.

Thank you!