The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is the most comprehensive institution in North Carolina, both in the range of its programs at all levels and in the breadth of its specialized research and public service programs. Its 14 schools and the College of Arts and Sciences provide instruction in more than 100 fields, offering 74 bachelor’s, 104 master’s, 65 doctoral, and 7 professional degrees, as well as 16 certificates, in academic areas critical to North Carolina’s future: business, dentistry, education, information and library science, media and journalism, government, law, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, public health, and social work, among others.

Since 1795, when its doors first opened to students, the University has remained faithful to its founders’ charge to duly encourage and promote all useful learning for the betterment of humanity.

The University was anticipated by a section of the first state constitution drawn up in 1776 directing the establishment of “one or more universities” in which “all useful learning shall be duly encouraged and promoted.” State support, it directed, should be provided so that instruction might be available “at low prices.” The American Revolution intervened, and it was not until 1789, the year that George Washington became president of the new nation, that the University was chartered by the General Assembly. Despite constitutional instructions to the contrary, no state appropriations were made, and the trustees were left to secure land and money themselves. On October 12, 1793, the cornerstone was laid for a brick building on a hilltop near the center of the state amidst the colorful fall foliage of dogwood, oak, and tulip trees.

The site, lying at the crossing of north-south and east-west roads, was marked only by a small Anglican chapel that soon shared part of its name — New Hope Chapel Hill — with the community that developed there. Legislator and trustee William R. Davie, who had been instrumental in securing passage of the charter, took the lead in organizing the University. Davie presided over the Masonic ritual of the laying of the cornerstone. In time he came to be called “the Father of the University.” Many years later a large poplar or tulip tree, first mentioned in 1818 and still standing near the center of the old campus, was called Davie Poplar in his honor.

The first building and, indeed, the only building for two years, was a two-story brick structure that came to be called Old East. It is now a National Historic Landmark, the oldest state university building in America. Opened to students on January 15, 1795, the University of North Carolina received its first student, Hinton James of New Hanover County, on February 12. By March there were two professors and 41 students present.

The second state university did not begin classes until 1801, when a few students from nearby academies assembled under a large tree at Athens, Georgia, for instruction. By then four classes had already been graduated at Chapel Hill, and there were to be three more before the first diplomas were issued in Georgia. The next building on the Carolina campus was Person Hall, begun in 1796 and long used as the chapel. The cornerstone of Main or South Building was laid in 1798. All three are older than any other American state university building.

The Young University

During the early 19th century the trustees began a period of strong support in the development of the young University. Even though their
Commitment to Diversity

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill strives for excellence both in academic engagement and co-curricular support. Sustaining a diverse and inclusive community is critical to achieving educational excellence.

Framework for Understanding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at UNC–Chapel Hill

The work of the University in the 21st century functions in a global context. The historical, political, economic, and educational backgrounds of the University, the state, and the nation shape our present circumstances and inform the measures we must take to accomplish our highest aspirations. We acknowledge that we face an ongoing challenge to overcome the effects and influences of adverse historical, social, political, and economic factors. The University engages in teaching, research, and service to expand and discover knowledge, promote educational enlightenment, and improve understanding with the ultimate end of uplifting humankind. Education takes place most productively among persons with differing social backgrounds, economic circumstances, personal characteristics, philosophical outlooks, life experiences, perspectives, beliefs, and expectations. The University works to assure that we have a complement of students, faculty, and staff that broadly reflects the ways in which people differ. We believe that “diversity matters” within and beyond the campus community.

UNC–Chapel Hill’s commitment to inclusive excellence began in the 1960s through the support of minority programming and continues today through the establishment of the University Office for Diversity and Inclusion (UODI).

The University Office for Diversity and Inclusion (https://diversity.unc.edu/) serves as a resource to the entire Carolina campus and partners with all student, faculty, staff, and organizational entities. UODI collaborates with University officers and campus units to identify and implement strategies and initiatives for achieving the goals of increased diversity, with the goal of building an inclusive and equitable environment that values and respects the contributions of students, faculty, and staff. UODI provides diversity education, opportunities, and development for faculty, staff, students, and community members; develops, implements, and supports recruitment and leadership programs that facilitate access and retention and promote inclusive excellence across institutional segments (e.g., student enrollment, faculty hiring, staff development); conducts diversity research, assessment, and reporting to generate and inform the campus and beyond on diversity-related issues; and provides consultation and project management to promote and enhance diversity and community engagement.

Partnerships and collaborations with vice chancellors, deans, and other unit heads are leveraged to accomplish the University’s goals for establishing diversity within the faculty, staff, and student cohorts and for fulfilling the public university mission of service, outreach, and engagement. Additional information can be found at diversity.unc.edu (http://diversity.unc.edu).