

Christopher Columbus Fordham III '47

This is what Chancellor Christopher Columbus Fordham III told the *Daily Tar Heel* a few months ago:

“I believe it’s difficult for the incumbent to judge his degree of success or failure. You just go with your instincts and what you hear and sense from others, and do the best you can.”

That leaves it to us to judge for him: the success or failure of this incumbent chancellor his tenure has been a rousing success! Since his inauguration in 1980, Carolina has consistently climbed in the rankings of the nation’s universities. Rankings of all sorts—of the faculty, of the professional schools, of the quality of education—rank UNC among the nation’s elite.

The Hanes Art Center, the UNC Press Building, the Smith Student Activities Center, the Student Health Service Building, the Kenan Center, the Davis Library, Fetzer Gymnasium, the Lineberger Cancer Research Center, the new teaching laboratory for the Department of Chemistry, the new Sitterson Computer Science Building, Carmichael Residence Hall—none were here when Chris took over. All are now serving the needs of this institution.

If in fact Chris has “gone with his instincts” in leading UNC through the 80’s, his instincts have been on target. In a fragile economic climate, the line has been held on state support. Research funding from outside has leapt. In 1986, Carolina passed Duke in getting new National Institutes of Health grants, Carolina’s total growing from \$38.3 million in 1984 to \$57.4 million just two years later, an unprecedented 50 per cent growth. Minorities’ presence and influence on campus have increased. The endowment has tripled. The stature and mission of the University have remained undiminished and have left the sons and daughters of Carolina proud.

We can cite at least two bedrocks from which Chris’s “instincts” spring.

One is his unswerving vision of the basic premise of the University. He recently spoke to the N.C. Press Association about it: “When we played the Naval Academy in football last year,” he said, “I pointed out that a commonality between the Naval Academy and the University is their staunch defense of freedom—the Navy against external enemies, the University against

internal erosion.” The University under Chris’s leadership has remained a force in the fight for freedom.

The other is his love and loyalty to UNC. He has frequently strayed, to offer his services elsewhere, but he has always returned. “When one’s own University calls,” he said when he left the Medical College of Georgia, where he was dean, to take over the leadership at Carolina’s School of Medicine, “then it’s a very magnetic pull.”

He enrolled at Carolina in 1943, but left for wartime service in the Merchant Marine. The magnet pulled him back to finish his studies here. He left Chapel Hill to get his MD degree at Harvard, intern at Georgetown University Hospital, and served a two-year residency at Boston City Hospital, but the magnet pulled him back, for a residency at Memorial Hospital. He left for a two-year stint as a medical officer in the Air Force and then private practice in Greensboro, but the magnet pulled him back, then as a member of the Medical School faculty. After nine years of teaching and ministering to patients, Chris left us again, to become dean at the Georgia school. The magnet pulled him back one final time, to be dean of our medical school, then vice chancellor for health affairs, and now chancellor.

He was renowned for his compassion, skill and sense of balance as a practicing physician at Memorial. He was the one that the doctors took their sick family members to see. He brought that same compassion, skill and balance to the administration of the University. Universally respected, Chris Fordham has served us well, and continues to do so as he looks to the change of leadership when his tenure as chancellor ends.

His golfing buddy, Coach Dean Smith says: “He is the most honest man I ever saw on a golf course. He won’t even take what the rules allow, such as a free drop out of the water, unless he thinks it really applies. As my partner, it sometimes works to our disadvantage!”

That character is the mark of a man, however, that has worked to Carolina’s unending advantage.