

Sullivan, Patricia ^[1]

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Sullivan, Patricia Ann (Pat)

Originally published as "Chancellor Patricia A. Sullivan: Encoded in the DNA of UNCG"

by Erin Lawrimore, 2019
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UNCG opened its doors in 1892 as a publicly-supported school for women from across North Carolina (and beyond) to receive a higher education. But it would not be until the 103rd year of the school's existence that a woman would serve as the university's highest-ranking administrator. On January 1, 1995, Dr. Patricia A. Sullivan officially became the 9th Chancellor of the [University of North Carolina at Greensboro](#)^[2] and the first woman to hold the chief executive position on campus.

Dr. Patricia Sullivan was born Patricia Ann Nagengast in Staten Island, NY in 1939. She earned a B.A. in biology from Notre Dame College of [St. John's University](#) ^[3] in 1961. She then went on to earn both a masters degree in 1964 and then a Ph.D. in 1967 from [New York University](#) ^[4]. Her work experience included research positions with the [National Institutes of Health](#) ^[5] as well as faculty positions at Wagner College, Wells College, Texas Woman's University, and Salem College. She also served as Dean of the College at Salem College from 1981 to 1987, and as Vice President for Academic Affairs at Texas Woman's University from 1987 until her hiring at UNCG in 1995.

During her time at UNCG, the campus underwent a number of major changes that helped it become the institution it is today. Under Sullivan's leadership, enrollment at UNCG reached an all-time high, while academic standards for admissions also increased. Enrollment of students from underrepresented communities also increased significantly during this time. As JoAnne Smart Drane, one of the first African American students to attend the school, noted in a tribute to Sullivan, "she valued the University's diversity as strength."

Sullivan also led a charge to move UNCG to its current classification as a Research University with High Research Activity. Funded research grew 180% during her years as chancellor, from \$12.7 million to \$36 million. Additionally, numerous doctoral programs were established during this time, including Ph.D. programs in nursing, geography, economics, information systems, special education, community health, communication sciences and disorders, history and medicinal biochemistry. UNCG also established partnerships with [North Carolina A&T University](#) ^[6] to found both the [Gateway University Research Park](#) ^[7] and the [Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering](#) ^[8].

Not only did the academic landscape of UNCG change under Sullivan's leadership, but the physical landscape changed as well. Sullivan diligently advocated on behalf of the North Carolina Higher Education Improvement Bonds, which was the largest bond referendum for public education in United States history. Ultimately, the passage of the bond referendum provided \$3.1 billion for construction at state universities and community colleges across North Carolina. UNCG received \$166 million from the referendum for construction and renovations. The science building that would later be named in Sullivan's honor was constructed as a result of that referendum. Numerous other buildings -- including the Brown Building, Forney Building, and the UNCG Auditorium -- were also renovated and modernized.

Through the bond referendum, successful fundraising campaigns, and other donations, approximately \$500 million total in new construction and renovations were added during Sullivan's time as chancellor. In addition to the Science Building, the Gatewood Studio Arts Building, the Moore Humanities and Research Administration Building, and the Spring Garden Apartments residence hall were constructed during her tenure. Also, in a collaboration with [Preservation North Carolina](#) ^[9], the historic Chancellor's Residence was moved, renovated, and reopened as the Armfield-Preyer Admissions and Visitor Center.

On December 6, 2007, Chancellor Sullivan announced that she would retire, effective July 31, 2008. At the time, she was the most senior chancellor among the [UNC System](#) ^[10]. In remarks to the UNCG Board of Trustees upon announcing her retirement, Sullivan noted, "as with any journey, each year during which I've served as chancellor has been marked by great strides and great successes. Many inspiring challenges and surprises. Times when my heart felt great pain from the tragedies we had to overcome. And times when my heart swelled with pride at the accomplishment of our people. It has been, after all, a very beautiful voyage ... and I shall always understand what UNCG means."

Following the Spring 2008 Board of Trustees meeting - her final meeting as chancellor -- a ceremony was held in which the Science Building constructed with the bond referendum funds that she diligently worked for was renamed the Patricia

A. Sullivan Science Building. Board of Trustees Chair Steve Hassenfelt noted, "I think we found a way to encode Pat Sullivan and her tremendous leadership into the DNA of UNCG for many years to come." During the ceremony, UNC President Erskine Bowles also presented Sullivan with The Old North State Award, which recognizes "dedication and service beyond expectation and excellence to the Great State of North Carolina."

At her retirement, Sullivan was also fighting a battle with pancreatic cancer. On the morning of August 20, 2009 after a two-year battle with the disease, she passed away at the age of 69. A campus-wide service was held in her memory on September 14, 2009, with remarks from numerous UNCG alumni, faculty, and administrators. As the following Chancellor Linda Brady remarked in closing the ceremony, "there is a void on our landscape. But it is just a physical void. Pat's engaging smile and encouraging spirit - her intellect and reason - is on every hallway, in every building - in each classroom, studio, and laboratory. It's in the Weatherspoon, the library, the Elliott Center, on the athletic courts and fields ... Her spirit lives on in the hearts of all of us who hold UNCG dear ... and who continue the commitment to advancing the University that she dearly loved."

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