



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

*Proposal Respectfully Submitted to Chancellor Holden Thorp
and Provost Bruce Carney
to Establish a Campus-Wide, Two-Year Joint Theme
for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014*

H₂O Carolina

WATER IN OUR WORLD

Global Research Institute
UNC Global
Institute for the Environment
Carolina Global Water Institute
Institute for Global Health and Infectious Diseases

May 9, 2011

VISION

In response to the 2011 Academic Plan, a two-year campus theme is proposed by a group of UNC-Chapel Hill units to further interdisciplinary scholarly, educational, outreach, global, and artistic goals. The campus theme would be a vehicle to organize the University around a broad and complex issue that Carolina is poised to address. Lectures, seminars, symposia, visiting scholars, first-year summer book selections, performances, and other arts events would be undertaken to bring the issues around water security to the campus, the state, the nation, and beyond. The formation of a campus-wide interdisciplinary steering panel would ensure the theme would find expression in the widest possible array of UNC schools, centers, and institutes.

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WHY WATER—AND WHY NOW?

Human development has advanced more in the past one hundred years than in the previous one thousand. Whether judged in terms of income levels, infant mortality, literacy rates, or life expectancy, progress has been impressive and sustained. To be sure, the developmental gains of the past century have not been shared equally around the globe, but, on balance, a greater proportion of the world's population is living at a decent level of material well-being than ever before. Whether or not such progress will continue in the twenty-first century, however, depends in a large part on how well we manage our resources,

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including our water. Indeed, if the last century was the century of oil and energy security, this next will likely be the century of water and water security.

Yet, with the world's population likely to rise to 9 or 9.5 billion by mid-century, with urbanization continuing to advance, and with more of the world's increasingly urban population seeking to share in the bounty of economic growth and development, demand for water—already furious—will intensify further.

Throughout the world, communities continue to develop waterfront regions and to commercialize waterways, ports, and naval passages, creating a critical need for us to find an appropriate balance between growth and conservation. At the same time, the supply of water, particularly fresh water, is increasingly imperiled and less predictable. Climate extremes appear to be increasing – scarcely a day goes by without news of another serious drought, another diminished aquifer or water table, and also larger, more devastating floods, polluted riverine and coastal dead zones, and another fight over the building of an upstream dam, or use of existing dams, for water supply and flood protection. Not to

mention the un-newsworthiness of the millions of people who die yearly from water-borne illnesses and diseases, or the nearly one billion people—roughly 15 percent of the world’s population—who lack any access at all to clean water. Climate and land-use change are expected to exacerbate these serious challenges, and understanding trends and feedbacks between the natural and built environment is a key role of the University.

Although these problems are real and critical, there are also many encouraging signs regarding water use and policy.

Considerable progress is being made against cholera, typhoid fever, and other diarrheal diseases. People across the globe are becoming increasingly conscious of both the

value and price of water. Many bodies of water, formerly written off as dying or even dead, are coming back, and innovative researchers have pioneered new ways to use existing supplies of water more efficiently and to distribute such supplies more equitably. There is, then, much reason for hope, even optimism – although it remains contingent upon effectively managing water resources for the future.

Collectively, we propose harnessing the research, practice, and learning experiences at Carolina to help communities, governments, and businesses address key water issues such as:

- The sustainable use, development, and protection of our water systems
- Protection against natural hazards
- Ensuring access to clean, safe water for all

UNC-Chapel Hill’s Global Research Institute, UNC Global, the Institute for the Environment; the Carolina Global Water Institute, and the Institute for Global Health and Infectious Diseases have agreed to devote academic years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 to the theme: **Water in Our World – H₂O Carolina**. We seek to expand the involved circle of units to the arts, the sciences, the professions, the humanities, and the community. In doing so, we plan to apply UNC-Chapel Hill’s formidable human and institutional resources relating to water in order to extend our University’s traditional role as a force for both greater equity and scholarly progress.

Over this two-year period, we encourage exceptionally talented scholars, practitioners, and students from around the world to work with our own water experts in fields such as public policy, planning, sustainable development, environmental engineering, business, law, and global health. We have intentionally defined our research purview broadly, and are interested in high-level research, public policy proposals, seminars and programs, campus book reads, and actionable projects on water-related themes.

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We will build upon UNC's robust international cluster of innovative water experts who can help spark new thinking and make transformational breakthroughs relating to this most precious resource. Our hope is that this theme can enhance interdisciplinary research and practice while recognizing work done by faculty, staff, and students who are already committed to securing water for a healthier world. Much of what will be accomplished to secure water in this century will be led by those who are our current and future students, and it is our goal to inspire and challenge them to take this role with conviction, to learn from and collaborate with the world's leading water researchers, and to help us build a vibrant and more sustainable world.

Toward this end, we propose that the Chancellor and Provost declare a two-year inaugural campus theme of **Water in Our World – H₂O Carolina**.

(Campus Water Theme 2011.05.09)