

Millie Ravenel*Doctor of Laws*

Millie Ravenel embodies the spirit of public service that, along with teaching and research, constitutes the core mission of great public universities in the United States.

In 1979, Ravenel, working with then-Gov. James B. Hunt and his wife, Carolyn, became the founding executive director of the North Carolina Center for International Understanding. Their vision for the center, which operated as a public service project of the UNC System, was to demystify other nations and cultures in an increasingly interconnected world through people-to-people exchanges. Planeloads of North Carolinians traveled abroad to live for a week in the homes of people in India, Japan, Kenya and other countries, while more than 1,000 visitors from other countries did likewise in the homes of North Carolinians.

Over the next three decades under Ravenel's leadership, the center expanded its mission to promote global awareness among state leaders across a wide range of sectors. It has sent more than 10,000 North Carolina educators, legislators and other leaders to 50 different countries and hosted more than 5,000 international guests. Its Latino Initiative addressed North Carolina's changing demographics by sending state and local policy leaders to Mexico to learn about immigration and develop strategies for integrating Latino residents into North Carolina communities. Through its Global Teachers Fellowship, which often gave North Carolina teachers their first international experience, over 1,100 teachers took part in professional development programs in 19 countries and returned with expanded worldviews and lesson plans to pass on to their students. Global policy programs connected North Carolina leaders with best practices in education, economic development and energy policy throughout the world. And the center became a national leader in setting up Chinese language and culture classrooms that have enabled 7,000 North Carolina students to study Mandarin Chinese. In 2017, the Center adopted a new name — Go Global NC — reflecting its orientation toward a forward-looking North Carolina.

Though she retired as executive director in 2011, Ravenel, who graduated from the University of Tennessee with a bachelor of science degree, continues to pursue her vision of a globally connected North Carolina. She is working to build an endowment that will eventually ensure a teacher from each of North Carolina's 100 counties will participate in a global professional development program every year.