



PHOTO BY BRYCE ALBERGHINI

Joe Urgo, interim chancellor of UNC Asheville, hosts a weekly Cuppa Joe with Joe gatherings in Argo for students to get to know him. He said while he is happy to serve in the role, he does not want to make any big lasting changes, as his role is not permanent.

Interim Chancellor Joe Urgo gets personal

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The east wing of Phillips Hall undergoes many metamorphoses this semester as the small, administrative offices buzz with meetings, phone calls and even laughter as Joe Urgo steps into the role of interim chancellor. He leads in tandem with Karin Peterson, who now serves as provost, Urgo's previous position.

"He sees the provost and chancellor as partners," Peterson said. "That is how he and Mary Grant worked, that is how he and I are working. It means there are two people checking if our decisions make sense so that we're not making decisions or having conversations in isolation."

After Mary Grant announced her resignation from her position as

chancellor last September, Urgo was appointed to the position amid the ongoing chancellor search. Urgo's work follows in the path of Mary Grant, but with a personal touch and a desire to lead, making the chancellorship his own.

"When you're in an interim position, you don't want to make any major changes in direction because the full-time chancellor is on his or her way starting in July," Urgo said. "At the same time, you don't want to slide backward or get off the rails, because we have a pretty strong strategic plan that charts the course for us in the foreseeable future."

The transitional period within a university, much like the one UNC Asheville currently faces, is not easy. But this is not new territory for Urgo. Stepping into the role of interim provost in 2014 under the

chancellorship of Anne Ponder, Urgo quickly became acquainted with the ways of the university.

"I came to really appreciate the mission of the school, I really fell in love with the mission. I think we do things right here that a lot of schools are struggling to do. We do it really, really well," Urgo said.

Even as interim provost, Urgo's concern and involvement with the university on all levels stood out to Peterson during a learning circle for program and department chairs.

"I was struck immediately by Joe's interest in understanding what the work of program chairs and directors looked like, what our needs were, and also his willingness to come in and offer support in a transitional time," Peterson said.

Amid the transition, Peterson said she trusts the university's ability to move forward with the new

administration and in Urgo's ability to move fluidly with initiatives while caring for the core values of the university, which exhibits itself in his balanced leadership.

"Both Joe and I understand UNC Asheville to be a very resilient place. We sustain ourselves through different leadership transitions," Peterson said. "I think what that says is that he is situated as an informed leader through this transition time and he's very sensitive to our context."

Urgo characterizes his chancellorship with regular office hours at Argo Tea, titled Cuppa Joe with Joe. These office hours allow students, faculty and staff to speak with Urgo, an opportunity that otherwise may be inaccessible to some.

"I think it's a really big deal to

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