

# PHOTOS: What's driving UNC Charlotte's record-setting growth

Feb 11, 2019, 2:34pm EST

Subscriber-Only Article Preview | For full site access: [Subscribe Now](#)

The best thing for [Richard Tankersley](#) about a very expensive, incredibly precise computerized measuring machine that GOM Americas Inc. has installed at the PORTAL at UNC Charlotte is that faculty and students are allowed to use it.

Tankersley, interim vice chancellor for research and economic development at the university, says companies like GOM, Sealed Air Corp. (NYSE: SEE) and Diversey have helped PORTAL become “the front door of the university to the business community that we try to partner with.”

Resident companies like GOM Americas and Diversey support and drive key research projects there, and, in turn, help train their potential future employees who are earning degrees from UNC Charlotte.

“It really represents an opportunity to connect the Charlotte business community and Charlotte industry and corporations to the talent of the facility and students that we have on campus,” Tankersley says.

UNC Charlotte Chancellor [Philip Dubois](#), Tankersley and others recently led a group of about a dozen members of the media around the 1,006-acre campus in



MELISSA KEY

northeastern Charlotte where PORTAL turned five years old this week.

Both PORTAL and UNC Charlotte are on a roll, with enrollment at the university topping 29,700 during the fall semester, an all-time high for the school that was founded in 1949. That number makes it third among other University of North Carolina System institutions, behind UNC Chapel Hill and N.C. State.

That's getting close to the goal of 35,000 by 2025 set by Dubois. He now says the university may have to boost that goal. "We're talking about it," Dubois says. A study found the maximum number of students UNC Charlotte could handle is 40,000 with the amount of land it owns, Dubois says.

But back to PORTAL. The four-story, 96,000-square-foot facility opened in 2014 with seven companies occupying space in the building designed to promote entrepreneurship and collaboration with private industry partners.

Now it has 26 companies on site, including GOM and Diversey. Yokohoma Corp. North America has moved on to its Concord facility after basing its R&D facility there in 2016. Diversey still has a presence in PORTAL and three other offices at UNC Charlotte.

Next door to PORTAL, the university expects to begin construction of an \$86 million Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in late spring. With a planned opening of March 2021, the center will help the university attract conferences and other events.

The university is also benefitting from being the final stop on the Blue Line Extension, which opened in early 2018, Dubois says. He calls it the "most transformational project in UNC Charlotte's history" because it gives students, alumni and the community easy access to the university.

**Ken Elkins**

Senior Staff Writer

*Charlotte Business Journal*

