The future lies in the hands and minds of those who have not yet taken a breath, which leaves to us the responsibility to create opportunity, an investment in which we may not personally see the return. Those who have experienced the importance of literature and libraries in their own lives, who believe in the power of education and creating opportunity for others to engage in it, are called to step up more and more frequently now as education receives less public funding. I encourage and urge you to answer that call and support the library whenever you have the opportunity to do so. Libraries are worth it, as there is no greater investment in the common future of the human race than one in education.

As a student, I personally use the Jackson Library daily. This practice has led me to discover a wide range of library services and most recently to a fantastic employment opportunity. Initially, I came to the library for the quiet studying atmosphere until I began to realize the many benefits and advantages the library had to offer. Through the library, I have had many doors opened and opportunities given to me. One that I hold most important came last March. I had the opportunity to meet and speak with one of my favorite journalists, Mr. Hal Crowther, when the Friends of the UNCG Libraries brought him as a speaker to their annual dinner. I will never forget that encounter and the wisdom that Mr. Crowther shared with me.

A multitude of information is available to students if and anytime they need it. Thanks to the “24/5” program, which enables students to have full access to the stacks portion of library twenty four hours a day, five days a week, I have pulled off miracles through marathon studying sessions. During exam time especially, this is a crucial part of collegiate survival. There is no other place that I am able to do the quantity and quality of work than at my favorite table in the basement of the library. Currently, my record is 36 consecutive hours spent in the library studying for finals and writing papers.

Some of the most important resources, in my opinion, are the database subscriptions that all students have access to. Databases are a necessary part of writing academic papers and engaging in effective research. UNCG students can access more than 350 of them from anywhere that holds an Internet connection, and can even contact a library staff member for help with them through a chat forum or text message. If a student needs any type of literature, an out of print book, a scholarly journal article, or a book from around the world, the Interlibrary Loan program can bring the needed research materials to the student at no cost. I recently wrote a research paper on how the income levels and population size of small, medium, and large cities affect military enlistment rates. I used the “Ask a Librarian” service not only for navigating databases such as JSTOR and EBSCO, but also for citing articles and other assistance. These services might otherwise have cost a small fortune, but I did not pay a dime and received useful advice that I still use today.

Effective studying is the foundation of academic success, but in order for effective studying to occur, an environment conducive to study must be available. There is a reason that so many students choose the library as the place they go to when they need to concentrate and work to the best of their ability. Since I became a regular attendee and claimed a small plot of space as my own in the basement of Jackson Library that conveniently does not have cell phone reception, my grade point average has shot straight up. After my freshman year, it was as though I became a completely different student, and I credit the library for that progress.

Libraries are, in my opinion, essentially the “giving trees” of the college campus, to borrow a metaphor from Shel Silverstein’s famous children’s book. I see the library as a giving tree because of the fact that it offers services, information, and programs to enrich learning and knowledge seeking members of the surrounding Greensboro community without charging or asking for anything in return. It is a common practice for many to take what they need from the library, take advantage of a program in the library, use a service in the library, gain inspiration, and learn in the library but not stop to think about how much the library benefits them. Instead of following the path of the main character in Silverstein’s book, the time has come for us all to replenish the giving tree, to invest in the common future of opportunity for the coming generations who will need the library just as we do.