CAROL FOLT, WHO MOST RECENTLY SERVED AS THE CHANCELLOR of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, will take the helm on July 1, becoming the first woman to permanently be U.S.C.’s president; she follows Wanda Austin, who served in an interim capacity.

Ms. Folt is a native of Akron, Ohio, but she first came to California for college, where she went to Santa Barbara City College and then transferred to U.C. Santa Barbara. Later, she earned her doctorate at U.C. Davis.

Her first jobs as a professor and university administrator were at Dartmouth. But her time at U.N.C. has drawn the most attention until now.

During her tenure there, Ms. Folt grappled with two controversies that drew national scrutiny: an academic scandal involving student-athletes, and the fate of the Confederate monument known as “Silent Sam.” (“The athletics controversy
began before Ms. Folt’s stint as chancellor, but the university faced the fallout while she was in office.)

The monument provoked years of acrimony at U.N.C., where protesters toppled part of it last August. She later announced her resignation — and the removal of the monument’s remnants.

I talked to Ms. Folt yesterday about what she had learned from those past experiences and how she planned to rebuild trust in a troubled institution. Our interview has been edited and condensed for length.

How does it feel to be coming back to California?
My husband and I came and we went up to Griffith Park, and you're having this phenomenal flower bloom in California that I have taught about in the past, so getting to go up there, looking out over the whole area, seeing some of these blooms and some of the greenest foothills I have ever seen. We went, O.K., it’s great to feel at home.

You're coming in on the heels of the admissions scandal and a series of other challenges. Do you think U.S.C. has a systemic corruption problem and if so, how would you address that?
When I look at U.S.C. I see so much that is opportunity. I see the $320 million in grants-in-aid, one of the largest financial aid pools in the country. I see incredible faculty, with Nobel laureates and Genius awards, making discoveries that are changing health care, and I see a student body that is outstanding.

I look at that and I’m thinking we are a large, complex organization and we have challenges. Every campus president has to handle tough issues because every university has them.

I look at it in that context and I say, O.K., we have to get this right. Now what has really been encouraging to me is there hasn't been a person I have met who has not said we have the ambition to get this right. You can have all the great things in the world, but if you're not ready to face change and make changes that are necessary, you won't succeed.

Are there any specific transparency changes that you’ll make right off the bat?
I'm a scientist and a researcher so I'm going to do what I have always done: I'm going to gather the facts. So it can't be any faster than it takes to make thoughtful decisions.

I did learn at U.N.C. that when people came together to make reforms, they have such a stronger likelihood of being successful. There is nothing more compelling to people than being part of a solution exercise that really works.

You do that once, it’s easier to do that a second time and a third time.

What would you say to any student — and I’m thinking particularly of students from less represented groups on campus — what would you say to reassure them that the admissions process is fair?
I think what we have to say is we're doing everything we can to make sure that process is really fair. We’ve been raising as much funding as we can to make sure we can become affordable.

The diversity of the undergraduate body is fantastic — that includes first-generation, Pell Grant, students that are veterans — and we want to see that even grow.

Having come from a community college in California and transferring to a university, I am so excited about the capacity of this university to bring students to transfer in is so strong and I want to make sure every one of those transfer students has the exact same opportunity as every other student.

These are some things that we want to do and I would love to go and talk to students about it. Every student should be reassured that a degree from U.S.C. remains extremely valuable and is very positively viewed in the world. But that doesn't mean that we are where we want to be and we can't make changes.