When George Williams was working as a statistician at the National Institute of Mental Health in the 1960s, he became interested in the application of statistics to public health problems. A “numbers man,” with degrees in both mathematics and statistics, Williams wanted to add a medical component to his academic discipline. So in 1970, he came to Carolina’s School of Public Health to get a PhD in biostatistics.

Now, with almost four decades of leadership experience under his belt, Williams continues to credit his time in Chapel Hill for his success. “There is no doubt in my mind how impactful UNC has been to my career,” he says. “From the educational component to the breadth and quality of research that I was able to consider… a lot of the things I’ve done were nurtured by the excitement and enthusiasm I saw from my days at Carolina.”

Williams is vice president of Global Biomedical Data Sciences at Amgen, Inc., a global biotechnology company that discovers, develops, manufactures and markets human therapeutics based on advances in cellular and molecular biology. Previously he worked in various leadership positions at Merck & Co., Inc., and Bristol-Myers Squibb. He also spent almost a decade in the academic sector as a biostatistics professor at the University of Michigan.

Today Williams continues to collaborate with people he met while a student at Carolina. He says one of the best things about going to Carolina is the connections that continue beyond the classroom. “It’s not just the experience you have while you’re on campus. It’s also the opportunity to interact with faculty and students in various ways over the course of a long-term career,” he says. “Even now, I continue to benefit from their wisdom.”

When Thomas Ricketts came back to North Carolina in search of a job in medical journalism, he didn’t know that years later, he would influence government decisions on health policy and administration in the state.

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Vice president at Amgen, Inc. says connections made at Carolina continue

When Ricketts talks, the N.C. General Assembly listens

“Tom is very creative in terms of thinking about how delivery of health care relates to the work force supply.”

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“One of the first stories I ever did for a local newspaper in Chapel Hill was about rural health policy in North Carolina. I didn’t know at that time, but that should have told me something,” says Ricketts, who earned a bachelor’s in history from Carolina as a Morehead Scholar and worked as production and design manager at the Washington (D.C.) Monthly before returning to the Tar Heel state.

Ricketts is now professor of health policy at Carolina’s School of Public Health and director of the North Carolina Rural Health Research Program at UNC. He also is chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee for United Health Foundation’s annual review, “America’s Health Rankings: A Call to Action for People and Their Communities.” UNC’s School of Public Health is the academic partner to the review, which also is sponsored by the American Public Health Association and the Partnership for Prevention.

Ricketts says he started his public health academic pursuits and passion for health care administration have led him on a journey punctuated by degrees, awards and national recognition. He earned his doctorate in health policy from the School in 1988. He speaks French and Russian and, as a side note, is an avid bicyclist who has successfully completed amateur stages of the Tour de France.

These days, as director of the North Carolina Rural Health Research Program in the UNC Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Ser-