

Message from the Chair: The Mural Removal

In August 2025, as the fall semester at Carolina was about to begin, university personnel boarded over a mural at the Hanes Art Center. The mural was characterized by its contributors as a “Palestine resilience mural.” Some faculty and students complained that covering the mural constituted censorship.

UNC AFSA opposes censorship and favors institutional neutrality. If the covering, and ultimate removal, of the mural was based solely on its content, i.e., promoting the cause of the Palestinians and opposing Israel, our organization would oppose such action and would make our objections known to UNC’s administration.

As we learned more about the matter, it became clear that this the removal of the mural was not viewpoint discrimination. The mural was affixed to the wall of a campus building. It was never intended to be permanent. It was created by students in Professor Hong-An Truong’s “Art as Social Action” course. As noted by Jim White, Dean of the College and Arts and Sciences, it was understood that the mural would remain on display for about a year, after which a new mural from a subsequent class would replace it. As White explained in a letter to *The Daily Tar Heel*, he understood that the mural would come down during the summer of 2025 “to make room for a blank canvas for a new student project.” When facilities personnel tried to take it down, they found that the paste made it impossible to remove the mural without damaging the artwork it contained. So, after consulting with the Chancellor’s office, it was decided to cover the mural until it could be safely removed.

Chancellor Lee Roberts and Interim Provost Jim Dean wrote in an email to art faculty: “The handling of the mural removal was poorly executed, creating the misperception of malicious censorship, which was not all our intention. We regret that a lack of communication led to anxiety, anger, and distrust among some of our colleagues.”

Dean White concluded, “Missteps aside, the mural was displayed for a year. It served its purpose in giving voice to one perspective and helping a portion of the Carolina community grapple with difficult issues. Decisions were made to strike a balance of perspectives, not censor advocacy.”

University administrators have the authority to place reasonable time, place, and manner limitations on speech, so long as such limitations are content neutral. A policy that prohibited a pro-Palestinian mural from remaining permanently on the wall of a classroom building, but allowed a similar pro-Israel mural to remain indefinitely, would be impermissible.

In this case, the UNC administration’s execution of the policy was far from perfect, as they have admitted. But it did not constitute content-based censorship or violate institutional neutrality. UNC AFSA will continue to monitor such situations and, if censorship occurs, we won’t hesitate to speak out against it.