



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-25

UNC ALUMNI FREE
SPEECH ALLIANCE



UNC Alumni Free
Speech Alliance

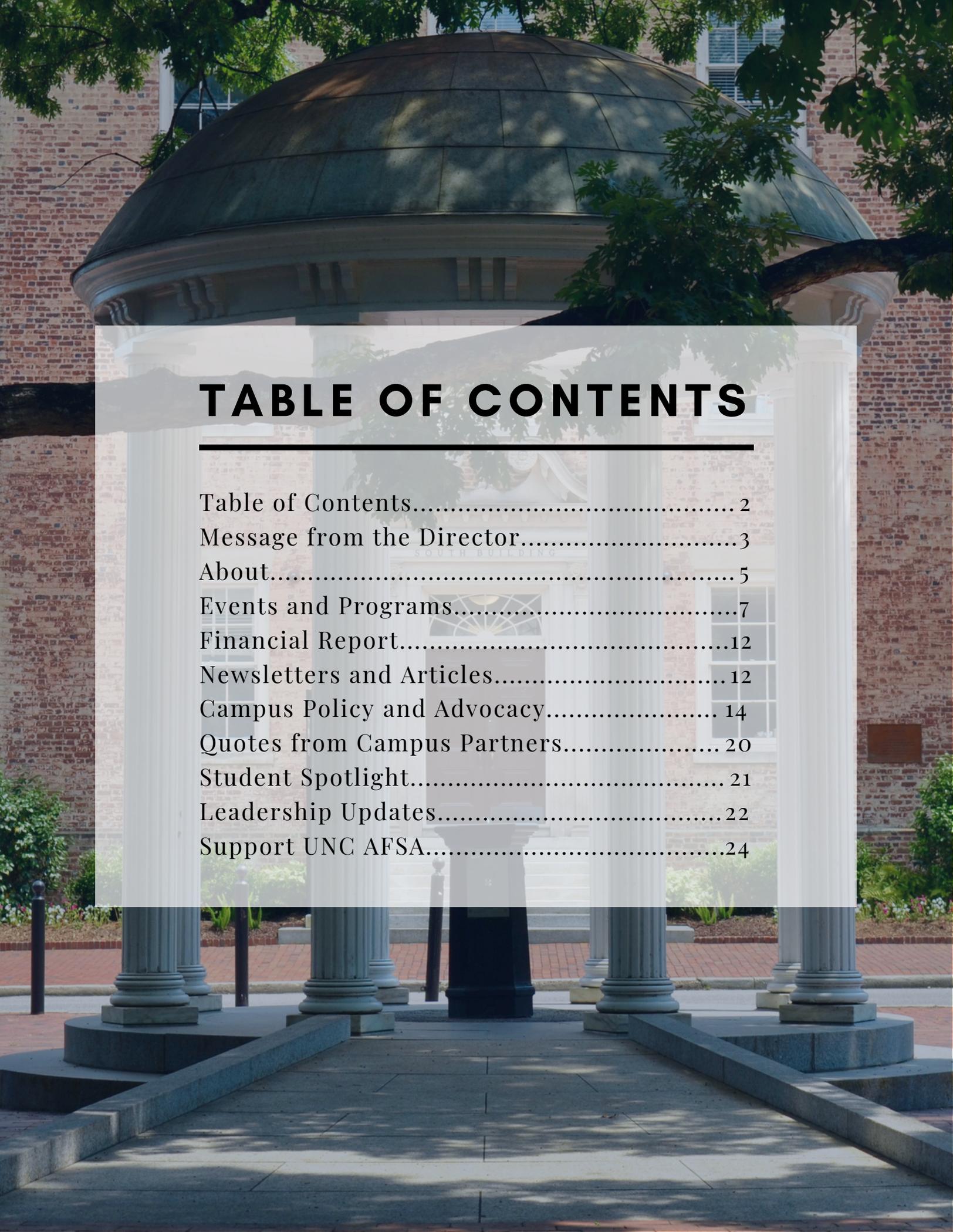


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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

To Tar Heels and Friends,

The past year has been a dynamic one for the UNC Alumni Free Speech Alliance and the broader campus free speech movement. With shifts in UNC leadership, the 2024 election, rapid growth in our organization, and new challenges to campus speech protections, the 2024-25 academic year demanded our unwavering focus and commitment. I'm proud to share that UNC AFSA rose to the occasion, delivering a robust year of programming, advocacy, and expansion.

Our heartfelt thanks go to our generous donors and supporters whose contributions made this work possible. Your support enabled us to host impactful programs, engage students, faculty, and administrators in reform efforts, and expand our reach to over 20,000 UNC alumni. To those who attended our events or responded to our newsletters with encouragement, your time and enthusiasm fuel our mission—thank you.

As current events have tested universities nationwide, UNC has navigated challenges with resilience. Years of advocacy from groups like FIRE, the James G. Martin Center, Heterodox Heels, and UNC AFSA, behind supportive UNC leaders, have equipped Carolina with strong policies on free speech, academic freedom, and institutional neutrality. Yet, challenges remain. Many students are afraid to discuss controversial topics in class and on the quad, and fostering viewpoint diversity on campus requires ongoing effort.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Our alumni community plays a vital role in supporting students and faculty who speak boldly and bringing diverse perspectives to campus. By hosting ideologically varied speakers, we not only introduce new ideas but also champion an open marketplace of ideas, embodying *Lux Libertas* in Chapel Hill.

The 2024-25 academic year marked significant progress toward our vision. We introduced fresh perspectives to campus, hosted our first debate, strengthened our student organization, amplified alumni voices in University policy discussions, and highlighted critical First Amendment issues at UNC and beyond.

UNC AFSA is growing rapidly, and we're bringing the Carolina community along with us. I invite you to read our 2024-25 annual report and reflect on the impact you've helped us achieve at our alma mater. We are deeply grateful to our entire UNC AFSA family.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harrington Shaw". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Harrington" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Shaw".

Harrington Shaw '24

Managing Director, UNC AFSA

MISSION

UNC AFSA's mission is to promote and defend free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at UNC-Chapel Hill.



VISION

UNC AFSA envisions UNC-Chapel Hill students, faculty and administration embracing free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity. The University will be an open forum for the balanced pursuit of truth and knowledge and the advancement of society. It will be a beacon of *Lux Libertas*.

2024-25 LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

John Bruce - 1975 & 1978 Law, Raleigh, NC

John Cohen - 1978, Greensboro, NC

Allen Corey - 1978, Chattanooga, TN

David Frost - 1980, Chapel Hill, NC

Frank Hill - 1978, Raleigh, NC

Maggie Horzempa - 2019, Raleigh, NC

Steven Long - 1982, Raleigh, NC

Doug Monroe - 1978, Richmond, VA

Robert Poitras - 1994, Chapel Hill, NC

Carter Pope - 1978, Atlanta, GA

Jenna Robinson - 2006 & 2012, Cary, NC

Blair Shwedo - 1979, Charlotte, NC

Bill White - 1965, Chapel Hill, NC

Kendall Williams - 2020 & 2023 Law, Greenville, NC

STAFF:

Harrington Shaw '24 - Managing Director

Hunter Klosty '27 - Intern



EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

UNC AFSA is dedicated to fostering viewpoint-diverse programming for Carolina’s academic community. Thanks to our supporters, we hosted exceptional speakers and partnered with campus organizations to deliver impactful events in 2024-25.

In September, UNC AFSA welcomed author and former *New York Times* reporter Alex Berenson, alongside his attorney, UNC Law alumnus James Lawrence, to discuss online speech, government-driven censorship, and Berenson’s First Amendment lawsuit against the Biden administration. Walter Hussman, UNC’s journalism school namesake, moderated the panel’s discussion on current media and journalism challenges.



EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

In November, UNC AFSA co-sponsored the 2024 First Amendment Law Review Symposium, which focused on campus free speech controversies. Panels addressed student protests, faculty academic freedom, and administrative challenges, uniting UNC law students with leading First Amendment scholars for a day of robust dialogue.



In February, UNC AFSA hosted its inaugural debate, “Immigration in the Trump Era,” featuring Simon Hankinson (Heritage Foundation) and David Bier (Cato Institute). Despite a weather-related shift from the Student Union Auditorium to Zoom, the civil yet spirited discussion drew strong attendance. Through collaboration with UNC’s Peace, War, and Defense department, students earned required event credits for attending UNC AFSA’s program.



EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

In March, the Student Free Speech Alliance (SFSA) and UNC AFSA hosted a student dinner at Carolina Brewery with FIRE's Special Counsel for Campus Advocacy, Robert Shibley. Students engaged in a dynamic discussion on First Amendment protections with one of the nation's leading campus free expression defenders, leaving them better equipped to address free speech issues at UNC.



“It was an honor to hear from Robert Shibley and learn about his extensive knowledge surrounding free speech. His experience and insights into major news events happening at college campuses across the country were incredibly eye opening and I was so grateful for the opportunity to listen to him speak.” – Sarah Maness (Student Free Speech Alliance member)

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

In April, UNC AFSA's 2025 Annual Meeting featured GWU law professor and bestselling author Jonathan Turley, who spoke on "Free Speech in an Age of Rage." Nearly 200 attendees, including students, faculty, administrators, trustees, and North Carolina legislators, heard Turley address the failure of our government and universities to protect free speech as a natural right. Prior to the keynote address, Professor Turley spoke to the law school's Federalist Society and the Student Free Speech Alliance on campus. The event underscored UNC AFSA's broad reach across the University and state.



"This [UNC AFSA] is an amazing organization. At a time when free speech is under attack...there are some shining points of hope. This is one of them."
-Jonathan Turley

"The dinner was such a wonderful event to attend. Not only did I engage in great conversations at my dinner table, but I got to hear such inspiring words from the speaker, Jonathan Turley. You could feel the energy of the room of people who believed in the same cause—it was such a special thing to be a part of." - Hannah Elder (Student Free Speech Alliance member)



EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Finally, UNC AFSA leaders attended the National Alumni Free Speech Alliance's 2025 Annual Meeting in Charlotte, headlined by Congressman Greg Murphy and Dr. Ben Carson. The conference united alumni free-speech groups from universities around the nation with allied organizations, including FIRE, ACTA, Heterodox Academy, and YAF, to advance the truth-seeking mission of higher education. UNC shone brightly, with speakers including UNC AFSA's Jenna Robinson and Harrington Shaw, UNC Trustee John Preyer, and SFSA advisor Professor Mark McNeilly.



EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS

7 Campus events

172 Annual meeting attendees

4 Co-sponsorships with campus groups

FINANCIAL REPORT

\$148,102 in revenue

\$150 median gift amount

(6/1/2024 to 5/31/2025)

Our 2024-25 fundraising efforts were supported by more than one hundred generous individuals and foundations who care deeply about free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at UNC. These contributions enabled UNC AFSA to bring heterodox perspectives to the campus community and improve Carolina's free speech culture. [Donate today](#) to support UNC AFSA's next year of programs, advocacy, and outreach.

NEWSLETTERS AND ARTICLES

To keep alumni engaged with the UNC community and the campus free speech movement, UNC AFSA places particular emphasis on keeping its members informed with newsletters and original articles.

This academic year, UNC AFSA distributed 26 issues of its "Free Speech Update" newsletter and several original articles to its growing subscriber base. Our newsletter, which was reformatted this year, keeps alumni up to date on UNC AFSA events, UNC news, and state and national free speech issues.

EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

UNC AFSA's original article topics this year included analyses of Carolina's governance and the role of the trustees, FIRE's data on free speech at UNC, political coddling in the classroom, viewpoint discrimination, protests, and more.

Thanks to concerted outreach efforts, UNC AFSA has expanded its subscriber base to more than 20,000 UNC alumni. This work will continue into next year, as UNC AFSA pursues its objective of becoming *the* voice for free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at UNC.

26 Free Speech Update newsletters

7 Original articles

20,000+ Alumni reached



CAMPUS POLICY AND ADVOCACY

The 2024-25 academic year brought significant developments in higher education, with UNC experiencing a particularly dynamic period. On August 9th, Lee Roberts was [elected](#) permanent chancellor. It wasn't long into his tenure that UNC jumped back into the headlines. Campus protests, which had intensified at the close of the spring 2024 semester, resumed early last fall, with some activities exceeding the bounds of First Amendment-protected speech.

On September 19th, a pro-Palestine “walk out” protest escalated into [disruption](#), with students entering at least nine academic buildings to interrupt classes, as reported by UNC. Protesters also vandalized the ROTC Naval Armory Building with spray paint. UNC AFSA has consistently advocated for a balanced approach that safeguards free speech by upholding the right of peaceful protest but condemns disruption and violence. To his credit, Chancellor Roberts echoed this stance, stating:

“Free expression and peaceful protest are, of course, in line with Carolina’s best traditions. We cannot tolerate, however, vandalism of public property or disruption of classes. We’ll pursue every avenue possible to hold people accountable.”

Following these incidents and subsequent investigations, the campus climate stabilized. Despite media predictions of significant unrest tied to the 2024 presidential election, UNC remained calm.

CAMPUS POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Protests and student activism persisted, but UNC AFSA noted a marked improvement in campus climate: demonstrations stayed peaceful, and administrators allowed broad latitude for student expression.

While ensuring public protests don't interfere with universities missions is important, the Alliance aims to ensure that campus policies do not infringe students' expressive rights. UNC AFSA wrote to the UNC Board of Governors concerning their proposed "Policy on Campus Gatherings & Related Student Conduct Matters." The policy was drafted in response to protests that went beyond First Amendment-protected activity. However, UNC AFSA feared that it overreached by encouraging UNC System schools to require prior notice for protests and by requiring intercampus reporting of expressive activities vaguely defined as "disruption" or "misconduct," rather than clear violations of law. You can read UNC AFSA's letter to the BOG [here](#).



The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) 2025 College Free Speech [Rankings](#), released in September, highlighted areas of concern at UNC. While Carolina earned a “green light” rating for its robust free speech policies, it placed 201st in avoiding “self-censorship,” with **31 percent of students reporting they self-censor in class** at least “a couple of times a week.” Additionally, **33 percent of students indicated it is “sometimes” or “always” acceptable to shout down a campus speaker** to prevent them from speaking. These findings point to cultural challenges that threaten UNC’s commitment to the free exchange of ideas.

31% of UNC students regularly self-censor in class.

33% of UNC students find it acceptable to shout down campus speakers.

Encouragingly, efforts to address these issues are gaining momentum. UNC AFSA, as well as groups like Heterodox Heels faculty and the newly established School of Civic Life and Leadership (SCiLL), are actively working to foster a vibrant marketplace of ideas. SCiLL [launched](#) a First Amendment orientation pilot program in fall 2024, equipping students with skills to engage in constructive dialogue across political divides. SCiLL has made building a free speech culture a core part of its mission, and [kicked off](#) its first semester of classes last fall. UNC AFSA applauds these initiatives and pledges to collaborate with SCiLL, as well as other student and faculty groups, to advance our shared commitment to free expression.

The fall semester also marked UNC System schools' reporting deadline for the new Equality Within the University of North Carolina" [policy](#), meant to replace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) bureaucracy with free speech, institutional neutrality, and academic freedom protections. Carolina [reported](#) in September that it closed its Office of Diversity and Inclusion, eliminated 20 DEI positions, and realigned 27 other DEI-related positions. UNC AFSA has noted that DEI, as implemented in the university setting, has chilled free speech through the institution of anonymous bias-response teams and the imposition of restrictive language guides, and has illegally compelled speech with mandatory diversity statements. Ensuring compliance with equality and free speech policies will be an ongoing challenge for Carolina and a key focus for UNC AFSA.

Nationally, the war in Gaza continued to be the primary driver of campus free speech controversies, with pro-Palestinian protests sparking debates regarding how to balance the right to free expression with legitimate concerns about campus safety. At Columbia, the April 2024 occupation of Hamilton Hall led to arrests and, in March 2025, a \$400 million federal funding cut for mismanagement of protests.

Harvard faced a \$2 billion funding freeze in April for resisting federal demands to eliminate DEI programs, alter the viewpoint composition of the faculty and student body, and restrict disruptive protests. Despite the fact that Harvard and Columbia were among the schools that earned an "abysmal" rating in FIRE's 2025 rankings (Harvard was ranked dead last), FIRE warned that such federal interventions could threaten academic freedom and chill protected speech.

CAMPUS POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Visa revocations raised further free speech concerns in the spring semester. In March, pro-Palestinian activists such as Mahmoud Khalil and Rümeyşa Öztürk faced immigration sanctions despite a lack of criminal charges or clear proof of campus policy violations. Hundreds of student visa revocation cases sparked self-censorship concerns among free speech advocates. FIRE [reported](#) that “55 percent of students find it difficult to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on campus, the highest ever recorded on any issue.”

55%

of students find it difficult to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on campus.

These national trends underscore the importance of our ongoing work at UNC. The challenges of self-censorship and protest management are not unique to Carolina, but our proactive efforts—through programming, policy advocacy, faculty collaboration, and student engagement—position us to lead in fostering a robust free speech culture. UNC AFSA remains committed to ensuring that campus freedom of speech thrives, both at UNC and nationally, while opposing violence, disruption of campus activities, and harassment of targeted individuals.



UNC AFSA had the opportunity to join the national conversation in March by taking action in a viewpoint discrimination case. Earlier this year, Michigan State University Professor Marisol Quintanilla had her promotion with tenure denied by a faculty committee due to “poor collegiality.” In reality, her “poor collegiality” amounted to her expression of anti-DEI and other views on politics and university governance that her peers disliked. The department dean reversed the decision and sent Dr. Quintanilla’s case to the provost and president for final review. UNC AFSA [wrote](#) directly to MSU President Guskiewicz, given our relationship with the former UNC chancellor, to highlight our academic freedom concerns and support Dr. Quintanilla. In May, the chancellor and provost approved Dr. Quintanilla’s promotion with tenure.

UNC AFSA remains dedicated to promoting and defending free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity, with a commitment to alleviating self-censorship, ensuring free and civil protest, and helping Carolina navigate the changing political landscape while upholding First Amendment freedoms. Through our advocacy, collaboration with campus partners, and engagement with students and faculty, we will continue to address these issues and expand the marketplace of ideas on campus, ensuring Carolina shines as a beacon of *Lux Libertas* and open discourse.



QUOTES FROM CAMPUS PARTNERS

“UNC AFSA has been a great partner for Heterodox Heels faculty in terms of partnering on free expression events, support on academic freedom issues, and sharing the UNC story on these topics to alumni.”

- *Mark McNeilly (Professor, Kenan-Flagler Business School)*



"UNC AFSA has been a valuable partner in fostering meaningful dialogue on campus by providing a platform for ideologically diverse voices. Their programming has enriched the intellectual environment for law students and campus wide."

-*Maria Colombo (UNC law student and UNC Federalist Society president)*

“By diversifying campus speakers and championing open discourse, UNC AFSA has helped shift the culture, partly by highlighting the narrow-minded and unproductive nature of masked protests and disruptive shout-downs—which are antithetical to the ethos of higher education.”

-*Emily Putnam-Hornstein (Professor, UNC School of Social Work)*



MEET THE SFSA BOARD

UNC AFSA bridges the gap between alumni and the campus community through its Student Free Speech Alliance, a registered student organization that collaborates with UNC AFSA on campus events and student advocacy. The Student Free Speech Alliance now has 35 student members, and will look to expand its network and execute another great year of programming starting in the fall.



HUNTER KLOSTY, PRESIDENT

Hunter is a sophomore from Chapel Hill, NC studying Economics and Contemporary European Studies. Outside of SFSA, he is interested in campus journalism and is the Editor in Chief of the *Carolina Review*. He will be interning at the *New York Post* editorial desk this summer.



SUNHEE FRECKER, VICE PRESIDENT

Sunhee is a sophomore from Wake Forest, NC studying Economics and Peace, War, and Defense. She is interested in the cross section between counterterrorism and diplomacy. Sunhee serves as Vice President of the Carolina Economics Club and as Director of MoMUNtum, a nonprofit that expands access to international relations for high schoolers



ENLEE WONG, TREASURER

Enlee is a sophomore at UNC pursuing a double major in Economics and Applied Math. He is from Clayton, NC, and outside of SFSA he serves as President of UNC Poker and plays the cello.



MATTHEW TROTT, SECRETARY

Matthew is a junior at UNC pursuing a double major in Political Science and Public Policy with a minor in History. Outside of SFSA, he is chairman of the North Carolina Federation of College Republicans and President Emeritus of UNC College Republicans. He will be interning at Senator Thom Tillis' office this summer and plans to attend law school after graduation.

UNC AFSA LEADERSHIP UPDATES

At our April Annual Meeting, UNC AFSA recognized Doug Monroe's service to our organization as chairman of the board, as his three-year term expired. Doug has been integral to UNC AFSA's growth and success, and he will remain active on our Executive Committee and as chair of the Program Committee. He also serves as secretary and on the Executive Committee of AFSA National.



UNC AFSA Board Member John Stuart Bruce was elected to a three year term as chair in April. John is a semi-retired attorney who lives in Raleigh. He spent most of his legal career with the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of North Carolina. John has served on the UNC AFSA board since 2022 and has served as chair of the Program Committee.

He received his B.A. from UNC-Chapel Hill in 1975 and his J.D. from the UNC School of Law in 1978.

Harrington Shaw will be leaving his role as managing director to attend law school in the fall, but UNC AFSA is excited to welcome Mark Zimmerman as its next executive director. Mark is a retired marketing and advocacy executive who was most recently Senior VP of Government Affairs for NC REALTORS® working with the General Assembly, Governor, and Council of State on property rights issues. He has lived in the Chapel Hill area since 1995 with his wife and four children. A Princeton graduate, the Tar Heels quickly became his adopted team. Mark serves as a board member for ASFA National.

Mark is accompanied on UNC AFSA's staff by our intern, Hunter Klosty, who also serves as president of the Student Free Speech Alliance. Following his summer internship with the *New York Post*, Hunter will continue working with Mark Zimmerman and the Alliance this fall.



SUPPORT UNC AFSA

Thank you for supporting the UNC Alumni Free Speech Alliance. Please spread the word about our efforts with friends, family, and fellow Tar Heels by sharing this Annual Report, subscribing to our newsletter, and following us on social media.

Please consider making a charitable contribution to UNC AFSA's cause to help us promote and defend free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at UNC.

VISIT:

WWW.UNCAFSA.ORG

OR

MAIL A CHECK TO:

P.O. BOX 8

CHAPEL HILL, NC 27514

The UNC Free Speech Alliance, Inc. is a North Carolina Corporation that has been granted designation as a nonprofit, 501(c)(3), EIN # 87-4744607.