



UNC Alumni Free
Speech Alliance

ANNUAL REPORT

2025 – 2026

*Promoting free speech, academic freedom,
and viewpoint diversity at UNC-Chapel Hill.*

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings, Alumni and Friends of the UNC Alumni Free Speech Alliance.

This year's annual report marks a special milestone. It's UNC AFSA's 5th Anniversary!

Half a decade ago, a handful of UNC Alumni were alarmed by the intellectual climate they were seeing on college campuses across the country. So they banded together to ensure that their beloved UNC Chapel Hill avoided the errors of its peers by staying true to its motto — Lux Libertas — light and liberty — knowledge and freedom. Their mission? Promote free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at UNC. Their vision? A university that is an open forum for the balanced pursuit of truth and knowledge.

Five years later? While many top universities in this country are in turmoil, having lost their bearings and strayed from their purpose, UNC has chosen a different path: to teach students to be open-minded and critical of their own and others' beliefs so they can succeed in their careers and as citizens.

What do we do? We're a nonpartisan organization that engages with the university administration and governing bodies to promote our mission's principles. We are cheerleaders for successes, especially the many policies adopted by UNC to protect free speech and academic freedom. We bring relevant UNC and free speech news to over 35,000 alumni through our bi-weekly email newsletter. And we host nationally recognized speakers who deliver perspectives that may not otherwise be part of the campus conversation.

Finally, we support like-minded campus groups, such as the UNC Student Free Speech Alliance, which conducts campus debates on current events and collaborates on all our activities, and Heterodox Heels, a faculty association that works to advance open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement across higher education.

As you know, UNC is blessed with some of the most engaged alumni when it comes to athletics — loyal boosters who aren't shy about expressing their opinions when things are off track. *(continued onto next page)*

We at UNC AFSA believe that Carolina's alumni should be just as engaged in cheering the university on to national championship-caliber academics. Students who will be joining UNC's alumni ranks in the years ahead deserve no less. While UNC is on the right track, we must continue to ensure it won't be derailed by those who would prefer the campus conversation to welcome only approved perspectives. Later in this report, you'll read about how we engaged this past spring to challenge an administration attempt to silence student speech.

UNC AFSA will continue to play an important role in UNC's future.

Thomas Jefferson, after declaring us free 250 years ago with the stroke of his pen, sounded this warning: "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." That is the responsibility we have assumed.

More recently, President Ronald Reagan cautioned that "freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction." Universities are charged with preparing that next generation. Our work on this flagship UNC campus helps to ensure the next generation won't be the last free one.

If students here are steeped in the baptismal font of freedom, they will carry the spirit of liberty through their lives. That is our goal, and you, through your support, enable us to do so.

The pages that follow chronicle our activities over the past school year. Although only five years old, you will see we have grown up a lot. It's been a busy year.



Mark Zimmerman

UNC AFSA Executive Director



ABOUT

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.

UNC AFSA is a North Carolina nonprofit corporation, 501(c)(3)
EIN 87-4744607.

2025 – 2026 LEADERSHIP

Board of Directors

John Bruce — Chair, 1975 & JD 1978, Raleigh, NC
Bill Blair — 1981, Wilmington, NC
Ted Bratton — 1978, Raleigh, NC
Jim Clement — 1982, Greenville, NC
John Cohen — 1978, Greensboro, NC
Allen Corey — 1978, Chattanooga, TN
David Frost — 1980, Chapel Hill, NC
Jim Griffith — 1979, Charlotte, 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 & M.A./PhD 2012, Cary, NC
Harrington Shaw — 2024, Arlington, VA
Blair Shwedo — 1979, Charlotte, NC
Kendall Williams — 2020 & JD 2023, Greenville, NC
Tripp Wommack — 1977, JD 1980, Midland, TX

Staff

Mark Zimmerman — Executive Director
Sunhee Frecker '27 — Intern

Leadership Updates

John Bruce, '75 & JD '78, finished the first of his three years as Chair. We added four excellent members to our Board of Directors, bringing the total to 19: Harrington Shaw '25; Tripp Wommack, '77, JD '80; Jim Griffith '79; Jim Clement '82; and Ted Bratton '78.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

“UNC AFSA’s fifth year was an exciting one. We grew our organization’s subscriber base sevenfold. We expanded our Board of Directors to have a broader reach among Carolina Alumni. We had another great community alumni event, this time in Richmond, VA, our first out-of-state event. It was our best one yet, highlighted by a very informative panel of experts on the free-speech climate at UNC.

On campus, we continued to bring in distinguished and knowledgeable speakers for lectures, Q & A’s, and debates. We collaborated with great UNC groups like the Student Free Speech Alliance, Heterodox Heels, and the Federalist Society. We topped it all off with a fantastic annual meeting dinner featuring veteran Washington reporter and commentator Byron York. As we start the new 2026–27 academic year, we’re confident that it will be our best year yet.

Please join us in our mission to promote free speech, viewpoint diversity, and academic freedom at our beloved Carolina.”

— **John Bruce**

UNC AFSA Board Chair



EVENTS & 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 2025-26. Photographs below are drawn from uncafsa.org.

September 3, 2025 – Heterodox Heels & Mark Bauerlein

We kicked off the school year on September 3, 2025 as a co-sponsor of the Heterodox Heels event featuring Mark Bauerlein, Professor of English at Emory University. Professor Bauerlein's topic was *The Soul of a Nation: How Civics, Humanities, and the Arts Shape our Future*.

He argued that the lack of general civics knowledge by millennials poses a threat to America's political and social institutions and that universities are failing in their role of educating good citizens. He advocated getting back to civics and liberal arts education.



September 22, 2025 – Ilya Shapiro

On September 22, 2025, UNC AFSA presented Manhattan Institute's Ilya Shapiro. The legal scholar, author, and commentator's topic was *From Cancel Culture to Free Speech Culture: Reforming America's Universities and Law Schools*. He discussed the ideological and bureaucratic challenges facing American higher education. Drawing on personal experience and national trends, he explained how universities in general, and law schools in particular, are failing to uphold classical liberal values such as free speech, academic freedom, and equal justice, and shared his recipe for reform.

Shapiro's comments were timely since UNC had just started a search for a new Dean of the School of Law. The UNC Federalist Society and UNC SFSA co-sponsored the event with us. A [recording of the program](#) is available on our website.



November 4, 2025 — Jay Greene and John Tomasi

On November 4, 2025, we presented the Heritage Foundation’s Jay Greene and Heterodox Academy’s John Tomasi for a debate on the federal government’s role in higher education. Their topic: Trump vs. the Ivory Tower: Government’s Role in Higher Education.

Universities across the country are debating the state of free speech in American higher education and are facing pressure from federal agencies to implement reforms. This conversation couldn’t have been more timely. Can universities reform themselves, or is outside pressure, like that coming from the Trump Administration, necessary? These two leading education scholars discussed what reforms are needed and how best to achieve them, with Tomasi arguing that universities can make the necessary changes themselves while Greene disagreed, contending that external pressure is required.



Heterodox Heels and UNC SFSA co-sponsored this event with us. A [recording of the program](#) is available on our website.

November 14, 2025 — First Amendment Law Review Symposium

On November 14, 2025, we were again a co-sponsor of the UNC Law School First Amendment Law Review Symposium. This year’s topic was “The Court’s Ever-Changing Religion Clause Jurisprudence: The Cases of the 2024-2025 Term.” The symposium focused on the First Amendment rulings from the Supreme Court during the 2024-2025 term, with thoughtful discussion on how these decisions impact the future of Religion Clause jurisprudence.



February 25, 2026 — Richmond Alumni Gathering

On February 25, 2026, we went on the road to Richmond, Virginia, for a reception with area UNC Alumni who were treated to a panel composed of Trustee Ramsey White, the Martin Center's Jenna Robinson, and UNC professor Dr. Florence Dore.

A Conversation with Connected Tarheels was a front-row seat to the latest UNC news, straight from the people who know it best. The program featured a wide-ranging conversation on key university matters, fresh insights into Carolina's direction, and plenty of time for questions and dialogue. A [recording of the program](#) is available on our website



March 5, 2026 — Richard Reeves

On March 5, 2026, UNC AFSA and SCiLL were co-sponsors of a Heterodox Heels event featuring Richard Reeves, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and President of the American Institute for Boys and Men. The topic was The Silent Crisis: Why the Struggles of Boys and Men Matter for Everyone. Reeves reviewed issues facing young men today and traced the deep systemic and structural challenges across education and employment that young men and boys face. Reeves argues that there is no longer a compelling vision of what it means to be a man today. What's needed is a hunger for formation, for purpose, for being told not just what not to be, but what to become.



April 16, 2026 — 5th Anniversary Annual Dinner with Byron York

On April 16, 2026, UNC AFSA celebrated a major milestone — our 5th Anniversary Annual Dinner — at the Carolina Club in Chapel Hill. Well over one hundred supporters gathered for an evening of fellowship, a wonderful dinner, and a meaningful look back at five years of remarkable progress for free speech at UNC.

The night was highlighted by an inspiring keynote address from Byron York, chief political correspondent for the Washington Examiner and a Fox News contributor. York's insights into the political landscape and challenges ahead left attendees energized and motivated. It was a truly memorable evening, and we are grateful to all who joined us in celebrating this important anniversary. A [recording of the program](#) is available on our website.



EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS

- 6 Campus Events
- 1 Regional Alumni Gathering
- Co-sponsorships with campus partners:
 - Heterodox Heels
 - UNC SFSA
 - School of Civic Life and Leadership (SCiLL)
 - UNC School of Law's Federalist Society
 - UNC School of Law's First Amendment Law Review
- 5th Anniversary Annual Dinner featuring Byron York
- Recordings of most events made available on our website and YouTube channel for broader reach



FINANCIAL REPORT



We are pleased to report that more individuals and foundations than ever before—from across the nation—generously provided a record level of support for promoting free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at UNC.

Their contributions made possible the year's programming, advocacy, newsletter outreach, and operations.

You can help our mission by donating:

by credit card at:
uncafsa.org

or

by check to:
P.O. Box 8, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

OUTREACH, CAMPUS POLICY & ADVOCACY

Communications

UNC AFSA exists to give alumni a voice at UNC, and we are not shy about being engaged through external newsletters and commentary, as well as correspondence with the Administration.

Newsletter

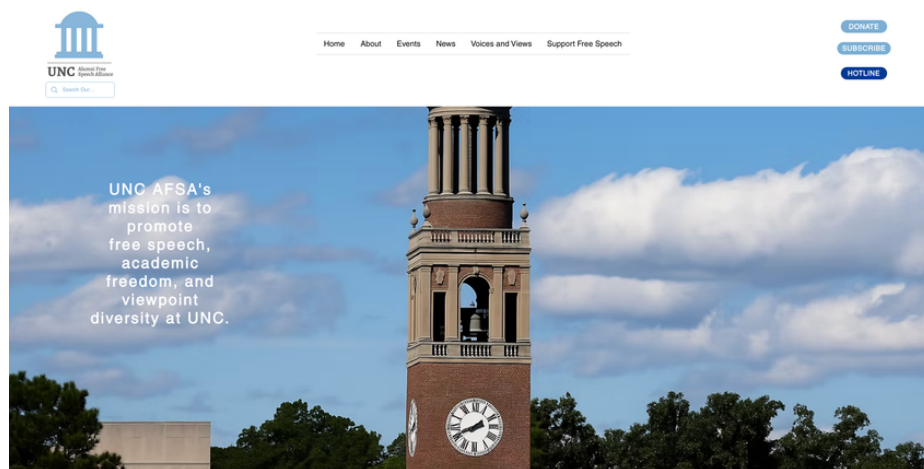
Alumni need to be informed to engage with the UNC community effectively. This academic year, UNC AFSA distributed 22 issues of its “Free Speech Update” email newsletter, with curated articles keeping alumni up to date on UNC AFSA events and activities, UNC news, and relevant state and national free speech issues.

Thanks to concerted outreach efforts, UNC AFSA has expanded its subscriber base to a record 35,000 alumni, making us far and away the leading voice for free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at UNC.

If you aren’t receiving our newsletter or know someone who should, it’s simple to sign up at the top of our uncafsa.org website home page. We will never share your email address, and you can unsubscribe at any time — although we suspect you’ll want to get our updates.

Website Revamp

We reorganized and enhanced uncafsa.org to make it easier for alumni and friends to stay current with the organization. The redesigned site more clearly presents our mission, events, commentary, and opportunities to support free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at UNC-Chapel Hill.



Commentary and Advocacy on Campus Policy & Issues

All has not been calm in Chapel Hill. If there's anything we have learned, there's never a dull moment on a university campus, so we were busy throughout the year. All of our original articles and correspondence with the Administration and Trustees are under the Voices and Views section of our website.

Here are several highlights:



Law School Dean Search

In what may have been the most consequential hiring process last year, a search was opened for a new Dean of the School of Law. Many of our nation's law schools have followed their undergraduate institutions in lowering standards. Given the impact of UNC Law's graduates on the future of our State, it is imperative to provide them with a balanced and rigorous legal education.

In July 2025, UNC AFSA wrote to Chancellor Roberts with recommended criteria for an open-minded Dean. We emphasized free speech, viewpoint diversity, institutional neutrality, and the fundamental principles of an American legal education. In May 2026, we congratulated the newly appointed Dean Andy Hessick, reiterating those priorities.

Free Speech Syllabus Proposal

UNC has robust free speech policies in place, but more than half of UNC students, like many of their peers across the country, report that they don't feel comfortable expressing their opinions on many current events, resulting in widespread self-censorship.

To make them feel more confident, in April 2026 the UNC AFSA Board wrote to Chancellor Roberts advocating for a mandatory free speech and expression statement on all course syllabi.

The proposal recommended a concise statement affirming UNC's free speech protections and the importance of open inquiry and vigorous debate. The goal: repeatedly remind students and faculty of free-expression norms and help close the gap between strong written policies and campus culture. We continue to press the university on this recommendation.

April Fool's / Institutional Neutrality and Student Speech

After the Daily Tar Heel and a campus comedy group published satirical content on April Fool's Day this spring that some found offensive, a Senior Vice Provost issued a University statement condemning the materials and the students/groups involved. UNC AFSA immediately challenged the University's statement as a violation of UNC's free speech and institutional neutrality policies. We were joined by national free speech advocate FIRE and others in calling for retraction, and publicly documented the chilling effect (including reported death threats and pressure on student journalists).

Within days, the University updated its student-affairs materials to reaffirm First Amendment rights, stated that no investigations of students or groups would occur, and declared that the University does not intend to chill free expression. AFSA welcomed the correction as an important step while noting the absence of a fuller apology and the need for better training of administrators on existing policies. In the aftermath, we issued a commentary that distilled practical lessons for the future, including: policies only matter if observed; universities should remain neutral observers rather than participants; student journalism needs defenders; and students should not be coddled.

This incident reaffirmed our role as vigilant defenders of free speech, including speech that we don't agree with or like.

PARTNERSHIP ORGANIZATIONS

We aren't alone in our mission.

Sunhee Frecker '27 - UNC Student Alumni Free Speech Alliance

Sunhee Frecker '27 replaced Hunter Klosty '26 as the President of the UNC Student Alumni Free Speech Alliance, with whom we partner for all our events. Sunhee is a Senior from Wake Forest, NC studying Economics and Peace, War, and Defense. She is interested in the intersection of counterterrorism and diplomacy. Sunhee serves as President of the Carolina International Relations Association and as Director of MoMUNtum, a nonprofit that expands access to international relations for high schoolers. *(continued onto next page)*

"Free speech is important to students at UNC because free speech is necessary to foster a strong educational community. Tar Heels care not only about learning but about challenging themselves and their peers. I believe free speech is the foundation of this intellectual growth and freedom of expression on campus. At a time of growing division politically, open dialogue is essential to finding a path forward in Chapel Hill and beyond."



"Our collaboration between SFSA and AFSA is mutually beneficial. While there are technical benefits, like booking rooms, I believe the most important part of the partnership are the conversations students get to have with alumni. This inter-generational connection gives insight that current students may not get anywhere else. Many alumni also understand the importance of free speech and continue to protect it through AFSA."

-Sunhee Frecker

Professors Florence Dore & Molly Worthen - Heterodox Heels

Professors Florence Dore and Molly Worthen stepped up to lead Heterodox Heels.



"AFSA has been a vital partner in promoting free speech, institutional neutrality, and viewpoint diversity on UNC-Chapel Hill's campus. What I appreciate perhaps more than anything about AFSA is its genuine commitment to nonpartisan inquiry. On a personal note, it has been a relief to be affiliated with an organization that actually welcomes disagreement and debate. I'm deeply grateful for AFSA's leadership in promoting the free exchange of ideas at Carolina."

- Florence Dore

Professor of English; Adjunct Professor, School of Civic Life and Leadership; Co-Chair of Heterodox Heels; Faculty Advisor for the Student Free Speech Alliance and BridgeUNC

Caleb Mosty - UNC Federalist Society

Caleb Mosty, JD '27, took over the helm of The Federalist Society.



SUPPORT UNC AFSA

Thank you to the large and growing network of alumni who care enough about the future of UNC Chapel Hill to support our efforts to ensure that current and future students are equipped with the critical thinking skills to succeed in their lives and be good citizens.

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 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



UNC Alumni Free
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***Promoting free speech, academic freedom,
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