



April 8, 2026

Chancellor Lee H. Roberts  
Executive Vice Chancellor  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Office of the Chancellor  
103 South Building, Campus Box 9100  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-9100

Dear Chancellor Roberts,

On behalf of the UNC Alumni Free Speech Alliance (UNC AFSA), an independent, nonpartisan organization of UNC-Chapel Hill alumni dedicated to promoting and defending free speech, academic freedom, and viewpoint diversity at our alma mater, we are writing to advocate for the adoption of a mandatory free speech and expression statement included with all course syllabi. This practical step would build upon UNC's strong existing commitments to free speech—such as the adoption of the Chicago Principles in 2018 by the Faculty Council and Board of Trustees, which affirm the broadest possible latitude for speech, writing, listening, challenging, and learning. These principles emphasize that debate and deliberation are essential to higher education, even for ideas deemed offensive or unwise. UNC's endorsement of the Kalven Committee Report on institutional neutrality further strengthens this framework by ensuring the University does not take official stances that could chill individual expression. The University's dedicated Free Speech at Carolina website and its green light rating from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) demonstrate a commendable track record, having improved from a red light rating in 2007 to green by 2016 through policy reforms.

However, despite these institutional safeguards, recent data reveals a clear need to continually remind the campus community of the importance of practicing and respecting free speech. In FIRE's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, UNC Chapel Hill ranks 19th out of 257 schools overall with a score of 71 and a C- speech climate grade, reflecting strong policy protections. Yet student perceptions tell a different story: 54% of UNC students report having self-censored on campus at least once or twice a month, contributing to an F grade in the Self-Censorship category (ranked in the bottom tier nationally). Related metrics show similar erosion, with Comfort Expressing Ideas graded D- (bottom 50 percentile, a sharp drop from the top 25 the prior year), Disruptive Conduct at C (bottom 50), and Administrative Support at F (bottom 25). Additionally, 79% of UNC students say

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

shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking is acceptable at least in rare cases, and 38% say using violence to stop a campus speech is acceptable in rare cases—figures that exceed national averages and indicate a chilling effect on open discourse. These findings highlight a growing gap between UNC’s exemplary written commitments and the day-to-day campus culture, where self-censorship and fears of backlash limit vigorous debate and intellectual engagement.

We recommend incorporating a dedicated free speech and expression statement into every syllabus that would directly address these cultural gaps by reinforcing UNC's longstanding commitments to free speech at the very outset of each course and normalizing free expression as a core academic value. This approach has proven effective at peer institutions, such as the University of Iowa, which mandates the following concise statement in all syllabi:

*The University of Iowa supports and upholds the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech and the principles of academic and artistic freedom. We are committed to open inquiry, vigorous debate, and creative expression inside and outside of the classroom.*

Linked to Iowa's Free Speech resources, this reminder educates students on their rights and responsibilities while fostering an environment where diverse viewpoints can be explored without fear of reprisal. At UNC, a similar statement drafted to reflect its policies—linked to the University's Free Speech at Carolina webpage ([freespeech.unc.edu](https://freespeech.unc.edu))—would serve as a proactive, repeated reminder to combat self-censorship and encourage civil discourse. By appearing in every syllabus, it would reach all students throughout their academic careers, embedding respect for open inquiry into the classroom culture and actively enhancing UNC's existing free speech policies.

Furthermore, such a statement would complement the recent UNC System regulation requiring syllabi to include the following: “the course engages diverse scholarly perspectives to develop critical thinking, analysis, and debate and inclusion of a reading does not imply endorsement.” While this required disclaimer usefully promotes viewpoint diversity and clarifies that course materials do not reflect faculty views, a dedicated free speech statement would build on it by explicitly reinforcing students' rights to express and engage with those diverse scholarly ideas freely—promoting the active practice of free speech and ensuring robust intellectual engagement thrives.

We urge you to consider implementing this syllabus requirement to buttress UNC's leadership in free expression. UNC AFSA would welcome the opportunity to discuss this proposal further and support related efforts. We are available at your convenience.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your commitment to upholding the values that make UNC a premier institution of higher learning.

Sincerely,

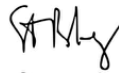
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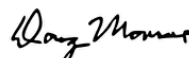
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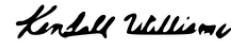
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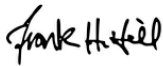
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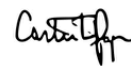
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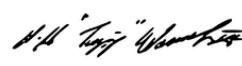
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