

The Daily Tar Heel

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2026

132 YEARS OF SERVING UNC STUDENTS AND THE UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 133, ISSUE 31

THE

FREE

SPEECH

ISSUE

The state of

free

speech at the University

and

across the nation

“ If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear. ”

GEORGE ORWELL

Established 1893
132 years of editorial freedom

ALLI PARDUE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
EDITOR@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

MADELYN ROWLEY
PRINT MANAGING EDITOR
PRINT@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

AVERY THATCHER
DIGITAL MANAGING EDITOR
DIGITAL@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

DANEEN KHAN
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
MANAGING EDITOR
COMMUNITY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

DANIA AL HADEETHI
DEI COORDINATOR
DEI@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

REGAN BUTLER
UNIVERSITY EDITOR
UNIVERSITY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

TAYLOR MOTLEY
CITY & STATE EDITOR
CITY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

MATTHEW MAYNARD
SPORTS EDITOR
SPORTS@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

LOLA OLIVERIO
LIFESTYLE EDITOR
LIFESTYLE@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

SYDNEY BAKER
OPINION EDITOR
OPINION@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

AIDAN LOCKHART
ENTERPRISE EDITOR
ENTERPRISE@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

GRACE DAVIDSON
DESIGN EDITOR
DESIGN@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

CONNOR RUESCH
PHOTO EDITOR
PHOTO@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

AVA SHARON
DEPUTY PHOTO EDITOR
PHOTO@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

KATHERINE MCRAE
DATA EDITOR
DATA@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

AMELIE FAWSON
AUDIO-VISUAL EDITOR
AUDIOVISUAL@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

FRANCIE WILHELM
COPY CHIEF
COPY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

MARINA MESSURA
DEPUTY COPY CHIEF
COPY@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

ABBY MISS
AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT EDITOR
AUDIENCE@DAILYTARHEEL.COM

Professional and
Business Staff

Business & Professional Staff: Will Lingo, executive director; Sarah Ederle, bookkeeper; Megan McGinity, director of sales; Barb Starbuck, creative manager

1893 Brand Studio: Sam Perry, managing director; Catharine Yoder, marketing director; Betsy Porter, account manager; Annie Ascher, campaigns team lead; Sophia Melin, storytelling team lead; Max Marlow, design team lead; Kiki Kozak, account executive

Advertising Staff: Alyssa Crane, Student Advertising Director; Eva Barratt, account executive; Delaney Broderick, account executive; Duncan Brown, account executive; Noah Hughes, account executive; Srikar Kalagara, account executive; Aleynah Maxwell, account executive; Anabella Mikels, account executive

Printing: Triangle Web Printing Co.

Distribution: Ricardo Harris

CORRECTIONS

- The Daily Tar Heel reports any inaccurate information published as soon as the error is discovered.
- Contact Print Managing Editor Madelyn Rowley at print@dailytarheel.com with issues about this policy.

Behind the
Free Speech Issue

“The Fake News Media, the true Enemy of the People.” — Donald Trump

By Alli Pardue
Editor-in-Chief

and Aidan Lockhart
Enterprise Editor

A year and one day ago, Donald Trump signed a flurry of executive orders on the first day of his second presidential term.

One of his very first was titled “Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship.” In it, Trump described the First Amendment as “essential to the success of our Republic.”

This is true. The freedoms outlined in it — religion, speech, press, assembly and petition — are the pillars on which a healthy democracy rests. But while Trump claims to champion free speech, his actions paint a different picture.

The federal government has been fervently revoking visas from students across the country, even detaining and deporting them. These are often students — particularly advocates of the pro-Palestine cause — who have participated in protests or written dissenting opinion pieces in their school newspapers.

As for the press, Trump has scorned and insulted journalists he dislikes. His administration has enacted policies to make it harder for journalists to access, and subsequently report on, government institutions like the Pentagon and the White House. And last May, the government defunded the public news outlets NPR and PBS on the basis of bias in their news coverage.

Some people, especially conservative groups like Moms for Liberty or anti-abortion activists, say they feel more free to share their views under this right-wing administration, according to NPR. Many conservative

groups and individuals have said that, prior to Trump, they felt censored in public and online.

But, NPR reported that other groups, like scientists and professors, feel more censored under Trump. They scrub from research, documents and grant applications certain words the administration has banned or indicated as grounds for review — like “climate change,” “gay,” “vaccines” and “women,” according to Pen America’s list.

At times, today’s increasingly polarized environment has emboldened citizens to take violent action against voices they disagree with. In Utah, prominent conservative activist Charlie Kirk was killed in front of thousands while hosting a debate event on a college campus.

We’ve also seen a rise in violence at the hands of the federal government. In Minnesota, Renee Good was fatally shot by a federal agent while in her vehicle protesting ICE’s presence in the neighborhood. Incidents like these have left many fearful of exercising their First Amendment rights.

But not all attacks on the First Amendment are violent.

Earlier this year, we saw one of the most blatant attacks on student free press in recent memory when administration at Indiana University Bloomington attempted to ban the Indiana Daily Student from printing news and fired its newspaper adviser.

Universities have historically been hubs of protest and civil discourse — and ours is no exception.

In the ’60s, UNC students famously tested the state’s “Speaker Ban” by gathering on campus as banned lecturers spoke over a low stone wall from a Franklin Street sidewalk.

More recently, state employees

and housekeepers have petitioned for higher wages and better working conditions. Students have advocated for Palestinians and protested the University’s connections to Israel. And just this month, students and faculty united to push back against the closure of UNC’s six global studies centers.

Tar Heel voices have always been loud, but students and faculty say they increasingly feel the power and safety of their speech is waning. Campus advocacy groups feel they must work in the shadows. Faculty and staff feel they can’t speak publicly or with the media. And year after year, headlines flash about censorship concerns, new restrictive policies and increased surveillance and scrutiny of personal and academic affairs.

In 2024, professor Larry Chavis’s contract with UNC was not renewed after his lectures were recorded without his knowledge. In August, University administration ordered a student-created pro-Palestinian mural to be taken down without warning. In September, professor Dwayne Dixon was placed on administrative leave amid controversy surrounding his prior affiliation with a left-wing “community defense” organization.

These events are representative of an environment that is increasingly harsh on rights to speak, associate and express freely in an academic setting.

Across the nation, the freedom of speech is not being “restored” — it is being attacked. If we allow those in power to silence the voices of the people they represent, we fail to do our job as journalists. This project is an effort to make those voices heard. This is the Free Speech Issue.

X: @allipardont
X: @aidan__lockhart

The 1st Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

It does not protect...

Private restrictions: No branch of the government may infringe upon protected speech. However, nongovernment organizations, such as businesses, colleges and religious groups, are not bound by the same Constitutional obligation and have the right to implement their own rules and restrictions.

Defamation: Defaming someone, which means spreading lies about them to the extent that it seriously damages their reputation, is not protected under the First Amendment. Those who have been defamed may sue for libel, which is written word, or slander, which is spoken aloud.

Incitement to violence: Incitement is defined as speech that is directed at producing imminent lawless action, and that is actually likely to produce such action. That lawless action, which is often violence, must immediately follow the speech in question — within minutes or hours, not days or weeks.

True threats: Expression directed toward an individual or historically identified group with the intent of causing fear or harm is classified as a true threat and is not a form of protected speech. Though, there is a high bar to meet for speech to be considered legally threatening.

It protects...

Protest: Legal action may only be taken against protesters when they defy time, place and manner restrictions, or when they incite violence. Time, place and manner restrictions, like requiring permits, should be content-neutral and unrelated to the suppression of speech.

Hate speech: Hate speech, while frowned upon by many in society, is not a legal term and is completely protected under freedom of speech. Though, nongovernment organizations may implement restrictions on what they deem to be hate speech.

Lying: The “marketplace of ideas theory” dictates that falsehoods and lies must be allowed to roam in the public dialogue in order to reach the truth. Lying only becomes punishable when it becomes defamation.

Editorial Staff

Assistant Editors: Alice Scott, Caleb Herrera, University; Sarah Clements, Jessica Hudnut, City & State; Beckett Brantley, Brian D’Aguanno, Sports; Becca Savidge, Kate Alexander-Heyward, Lifestyle; Eva Eapen, Opinion; Aubrey Word, Design; Michael Pearson, Photo; Jordyn Balam, May Proctor, Audio-Visual; Gabe Thumm, Emily Eschleman, Audience Engagement; Lilli Johnson, Brooke Xu, Dayna Wilkerson; Copy

Editors: Brigit Pierce, Crossword Editor; Ashley Hinostroza-Villacorta, Spanish Translation Editor

Investigations: Dania Al Hadeethi; Jessica Baugh; Lauren Rhodes; Satchel Walton; Keya Mahajan

University: Akash Bhowmik, senior writer; Claire Harutunian, senior writer; Sajni Patel, senior writer; Kayla Bradshaw, senior writer; Victoria Deal, senior writer; Lydia Winstead, senior writer; Jackson Auchincloss, senior writer; Dylan Skinner; Emily Brietz; Hannah Mackin; Joaquin Mestre; Jordan Andreasen; Michael Singleton; Ragan Huntsman; Suhas Nittoor; Tulsi Asokan; Kate Markus; Beyza Guvenc; AnnaJames Lynch; Justin Jackson; Ella Palmer; Charlotte Dowdy; Lauren Geddes; Julia Horstkamp; Delphine Liu; Bella Pires

City & State: Annika Duneja, senior writer; Brantley Aycock, senior writer; Ha Lien Gaskin; James O’Hara; Joseph Cole; Kristin Kharrat, senior writer; Abigail Mocharnuk; Amelia Linton; Emmy Grigoni; Jake Williams; Joshua Sarfert; Sophie King

Sports: Harry Crowther, senior writer; Alexandra Jones, senior writer; Josh Markotich, senior writer; Jack Morris, senior writer; Molly Louison; Dylan Stalter; Caleb Schalliot; Katie Reeves; Sarah Stephens; Marvin Lee; Tess Alongi; Lauren Mallett; Sofia Szostczuk; Alexander Panas; Amy Snively; Cyrus Porter; Eva Patel; Katherine Clark; Emma-Grace Hart; Sophia Brady; Sumayah Lodhi; Jeremiah Artacho; Colby Cotrone; Kendall Allen

Lifestyle: Emma Arthur, senior writer; Cooper Hall, senior writer; Nadia Jefferson, senior writer; Phoebe Martel, senior writer; Marion Rambler, senior writer; Mollie Ray, senior writer; Shreya Senthilkumar, senior writer; Amanda Aguilar; Mila Ahmed; Zahra Alqudaihi; Alexis Dorf; Sophia Firdausi; Eliza Hage; Ava Jenkins; Margaret Lyon; Erin Mun; Tiffany Plusnick

Opinion: Owen Baxter, editorial board; Luis Fuentes, editorial board; Arya Mehta, editorial board; Nakai Moore, editorial board; Mary Blake Nobles, editorial board; Teo Almaguer; Kyle Bublic; Quin Edelin; Connor Foote; Anna Gage; Cooper Hall; Paisley Holland; Radian Hong; Victoria Kirova; Sree Linga; Jaden Miller; Shea McIntyre; Kriti Peechu; Margeaux Pierson; Hannah Pomeranzeva; Hailey Rodriguez; Esha Singaraju; Mani Williams; Zain Zeeshan

Design: Amanda Hess, senior designer; Camila Garrido, senior designer; Carly Evans, senior designer; Mila Horsley, senior designer; Angel Shen; Audrey Murray; Brooke Davis; Claire Montero; Isabella Dugarte-Carrasco; Isabela Nash; Jayden Pupoh; Kaitlin Stratemeier; Kendyl Thomas; Lorelai Palmer; Margaret Jester; Meg Jenkins; Nick Lotz; Stephanie Hughes; Wren Silman

Photo: Pearce Barnes, senior staffer; June Brewer, senior staffer; Abbey McKee, senior staffer; Olivia Paul, senior staffer; Haydon Bode; Sophia Graci; Sophia Gray; Anthony Guerra Flores, senior staffer; Amanda Kirkpatrick, senior staffer; Kate McCullough; Julian Michael Swart; Mason Miller; Elyssa Mothershed; Cassidy Reynolds; Alex Yang; Sasha Anand; Alexander O’Brien; Alyssa Albritton; Annie Griffin; Benjamin Brickner; Benjamin Eggleston; Ethan Harrell; Eva Dew; Huseyin Tuna; Joseph Forgione; Joseph Moore III; Lauren Ray; Leena Grmani; Morgan Worsley; Rafay Niazi; Robert Lennon

Data: Aleena Sebastian; Alissa Shyshkova; Austin Pierce; Charlene Wu; Davis Hunter; Diya Joshi; Emma Taylor; Isabella Cooper; Ivy Nangalia; Marion Rambler; Sarayu Pesala; Shreeya Shabari; Sindhura Chundi; Winta Abraham; Yuqi Peng

Audio-Visual: Kshitiz Adhikari, senior staffer; N’Nia Brickhouse, senior staffer; Kayla Collins, senior staffer; Diego Lerma, senior staffer; Lauren Mallett, senior staffer; Nikhil Mehta; senior staffer; Andrew Sellers, senior staffer; Lev Bearman; Adarshana Lakshmi Narayanan; Addison Helms; Nikki Piedad; Tae Hong

Copy: Albert Carlson; Ana Katherine Weeks; Halle Tourian; Helen Dehnert; Kate Golden; Katie Mohr; Katie Zarzour; Lojine Goumaa; Lucy Cook; Maria Prasolova; Peyton Scheele; Reed Pruchniewski; Srinithi Mohan; Virginia Feagans

Audience Engagement: Amber Angelillo, senior staffer; Anna Gage; Anna Tinglestad; Ariana Rivera Romo; Arshi Ranjan; Claire Moran, senior staffer; Emma Carroll; Emma Evans; Kira Heppie; Lam Phan; Madeleine Denechaud; Nakayla McConnaughey, senior staffer; Payton Hutchins; Regan Sumy, senior staffer; Savannah Bishop, senior staffer; Shae

Mail and Office: 109 E. Franklin St.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Will Lingo, executive director, 962-4215
Advertising & Business, 962-1163

One copy per person;
additional copies may be purchased
at The Daily Tar Heel for 25 cents each.
Please report suspicious activity at our
distribution racks by emailing
dth@dailytarheel.com

© 2025 DTH Media Corp.
All rights reserved



Administrative Voices The Daily Tar Heel

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Schooled: UNC gets a D in free speech

Advocacy group gives ratings after wave of pro-Palestinian activism

By Dylan Skinner
Staff Writer

The Muslim Public Affairs Council released its Academic Freedom Report Card in October, grading 22 American universities on responses to student speech — particularly pro-Palestine student activism beginning after the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attacks on Israel and the continuation of the War in Gaza. Overall, UNC received a D.

Student activism remains commonplace on campus, and the report provides a look back at past instances and events of activist-University relations.

MPAC works to “advance justice, equity and inclusion for American Muslims,” according to its website. The lead author of the report, Misaal Irfan, said the goal of the report was not to “name and shame” the universities, but to open opportunities for dialogue about improving responses to free speech.

The organization graded the schools based on four criteria: the administration’s response; police or security force involvement; negotiations and dialogue with students; and these actions’ impact on free expression. The report’s D rating for UNC placed it in a category with 68 percent of the graded institutions — those that received either a D or an F.

Irfan said said the report was intended to help situate pro-Palestine

activism within the broader context of free speech issues.

Primary reasons for UNC’s rating, Irfan said, include six arrests made following the April 2024 Triangle-Gaza Solidarity Encampment and the Trump administration’s termination of six UNC students’ visas in April 2025 — which were later restored.

However, Irfan said that what saved UNC from receiving an F was that the University generally maintains neutrality, which protects faculty decision-making and research.

Sophia, a member and organizer of UNC Students for Justice in Palestine who did not want to include her full name in publication due to working for the University, cited personal experiences and those shared by friends as reasons to agree with UNC’s grade.

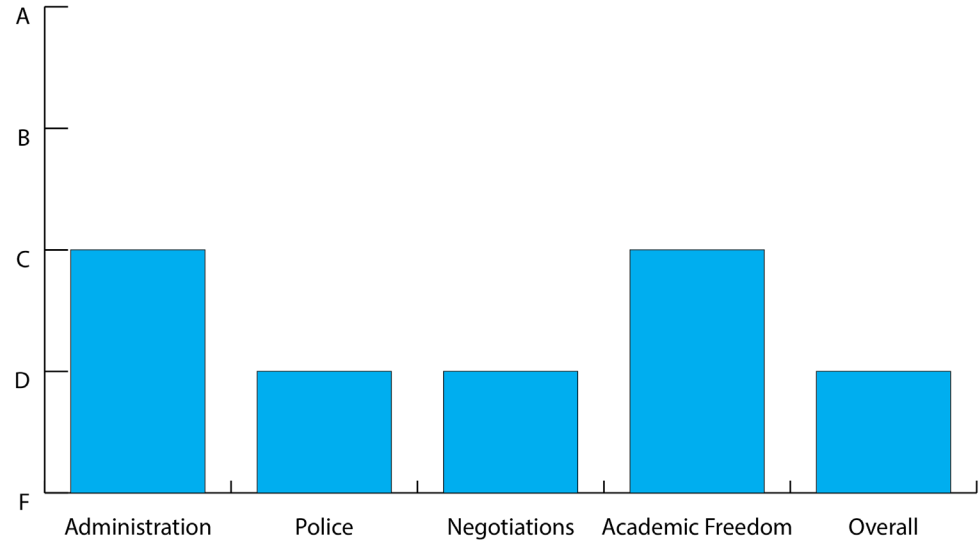
Irfan said another reason for UNC’s low grade was UNC administration not continuing dialogue with student protesters amid the encampment. Sophia offered a student perspective that aligns with this claim.

“Even before the protests, there were many, many meetings with administration by members of UNC SJP to discuss UNC SJP’s demands — which are disclosure, divestment from Israeli occupation, ethnic cleansing and ongoing genocide, along with boycotting Israeli institutions. With these many meetings, they basically led nowhere,” Sophia said. “They were just like wild goose chases.”

Darrell Jeter, UNC’s director of emergency management and planning, said the job of the University is to have these talks with

The Muslim Public Affairs Council grades UNC’s handling of pro-Palestinian protests a D

UNC’s lowest scores were in police involvement and negotiations with students, with both scoring a D.



Source: Muslim Public Affairs Council Academic Freedom Report

DTH DATA/YUQI PENG

students and allow the safe exercise of free speech.

“Our role is to engage and have conversations with the event organizers to see how we can correct those activities so that they can continue to exercise their free speech, but in a way that does not disrupt academic or administrative operations,” Jeter said.

Jeter said that the University, as a part of the UNC System, has to adhere to certain policies. No other UNC System schools were assessed

as part of MPAC’s report as potential points of comparison.

“Sometimes the takeaway that a participant of an event has may be limited based on their understanding of the details of the policies, the laws, the plans that govern our operations,” Jeter said.

Contrasting the issues Sophia expressed with the University’s handling of attempted communications, Jeter voiced the need for just that.

“If there was a misunderstanding,” Jeter said, “I would say we always like to emphasize we welcome feedback.”

Irfan said MPAC aims to bridge these perceived gaps.

“Our main thing is that we’re able to have [the universities] admit that there have been mistakes, but more so help work with us to figure out a plan to actually respond appropriately when things happen next time,” Irfan said.

X: @dailytarheel

REGULATION

Students say UNC System’s gathering policy discourages organizing

Protest-related guidance limits use of campus spaces

By Alice Scott
Assistant University Editor

Last February, the UNC System Board of Governors approved a policy to regulate campus gatherings, such as protests, at all 17 of its N.C. campuses.

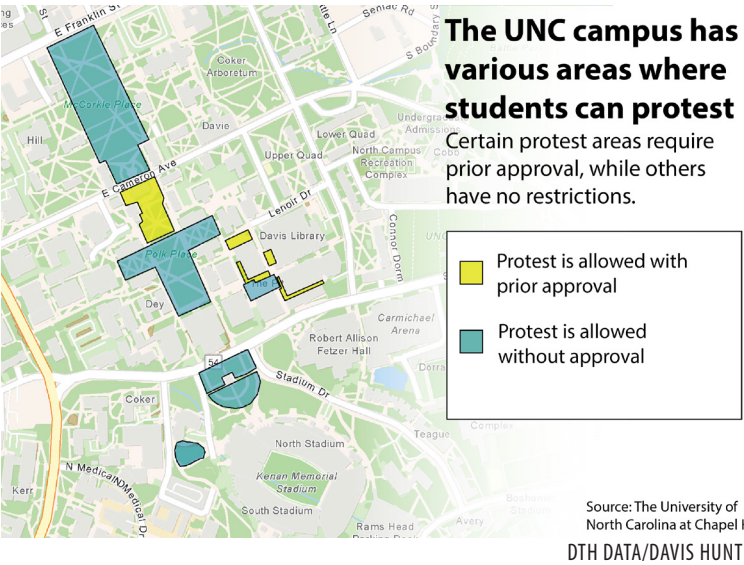
The BOG approved the policy quietly and without discussion through a vote on the meeting’s consent agenda. This marked the first time that the System has implemented universal protest-related guidance that applies across all of its institutions.

In a statement to The Daily Tar Heel, Christi Hurt, chief of staff in UNC’s Office of the Chancellor, wrote that the University has since updated its guidelines to align with the System’s policy, which went into effect in August. Hurt wrote that UNC is currently evaluating any further necessary updates.

In the months since the policy went into effect, student organizers have familiarized themselves with the policy and continued their activism on campus. But some students have said they have concerns about its guidance.

The new System guidelines, titled the “Policy on Campus Gatherings & Related Student Conduct Matters,” primarily focus on regulating the assembly of “mass gatherings” — mandating that individuals wishing to gather in large groups reserve or give advance notice to UNC administration.

As such, UNC has outlined that groups organizing a gathering expected to exceed 200 participants must make a reservation or provide at least 24 hours’ written notice to



Facilities Services and Campus Safety. This regulation applies to gatherings at any indoor space on University property and specified outdoor areas.

Amy Onyinye Okonkwo, the organizing coordinator and president of Sunrise UNC — a student group that advocates for environmental justice — said she wondered why this large gatherings provision was implemented. Sunrise UNC was involved with multiple protests on campus last semester.

“In terms of the context of a protest and what it means to really mobilize and build power — that involves a very diverse and ideally large set of student voices,” Okonkwo said. “So it really forces you to ask inherently what this policy was written to do, if not to press the ability for us to protest at all in large numbers.”

Lucia Paulsen, co-president of the Campus Y, said it can be difficult for organizers to predict the number of attendees at any given gathering. The Campus Y is a social justice

organization that supports students who are organizing and provides resources to those trying to engage in protest, among other work.

For smaller outdoor gatherings, individuals can assemble without reservation or prior notice at the Pit, the Campus Y courtyard and any of the University’s “Major Open Spaces,” which includes Polk Place, McCorkle Place, the Bell Tower and the Bell Tower Amphitheater.

However, individuals wishing to assemble at some other outdoor areas, such as the quad in front of the chancellor’s office in South Building and certain spaces surrounding the exterior of the Student Union, must be granted prior approval by the Office of the Chancellor and the Carolina Union, respectively — regardless of gathering size. Gatherings at all remaining exterior spaces on campus must receive approval from the associate vice chancellor for Facilities Services.

Indoor gatherings that do not exceed 200 people must only receive

prior approval if they are not put on by a University-sponsored or University-affiliated group that has already been assigned the space.

Although these guidelines allow for students to protest in many of UNC’s main outdoor areas without providing advance notice, reservation of those spaces is recommended by the University. This is because gatherings that have reserved space ahead of time will receive priority over any unscheduled use, even when scheduling is not required.

Paulsen said there are times when Polk Place, which has been a frequent spot for protests in the past, gets effectively “booked out” for extended periods of time due to this reservation system. Additionally, Paulsen said they’ve experienced difficulties with this process, once attempting to host a Campus Y open house on the Quad, but never hearing back after submitting a reservation request.

“Even with the reservations, you still might not have access to that space,” Paulsen said. “You still might not be able to use it as a public gathering space, as a zone of free speech.”

Requirements also change when a group or individual wants to put up temporary structures during their gathering. Temporary structures, such as tents or canopies, are not allowed in any outdoor University space without prior approval.

Additionally, camping is not permitted on University property except under extraordinary circumstances, such as a natural disaster. This guideline stems from the larger UNC System policy.

Camping was previously used as a protest technique during the April 2024 “Triangle Gaza Solidarity Encampment.” Organizers put up and camped in tents for four days before

the encampment was disbanded. At the time, UNC still had regulations regarding temporary structures.

“I would say that that restriction has been unsaid, but existing ever since the encampment was shut down the way it was,” Paulsen said. “I think that that was something that didn’t really need to go verbalized for people to understand.”

If the University receives a report that a student allegedly violates policy, that student will go through the student conduct process, Hurt wrote.

Christina Huang, president of the advocacy group TransparUNCy, said she thinks that the amount of guidelines that the University has in place for demonstrations can make organizing more difficult for students.

“I mean, students are very adamant that they will still continue to hold protests and rallies,” Huang said. “But in my opinion, it’s a way of using policies to neutralize and stifle dissent against UNC.”

As a public university, UNC is legally bound by the First Amendment to uphold free speech and expression, which requires them to allow protests and demonstrations. However, the University does have the right to place restrictions on the time, place and manner of this speech via its protest guidelines in order to maintain campus operations and ensure public safety.

However, Netra Parikh, the other co-president of the Campus Y, said she thinks the restrictions have a more profound effect.

“I think given the context of everything going on politically, any attempt on restricting free speech has deeper implications than just time, place and manner,” Parikh said.

X: @alice__scott

ANONYMITY

Can the University see what you post on Yik Yak? It's complicated.

A UNC junior learned the hard way that this may be a possibility

By Alice Scott
Assistant University Editor

Cogan McMichaels was fed up with the University vending machines. They were just too expensive, he thought.

So, in September 2024, McMichaels teamed up with his roommate to create an alternative: a food delivery service called StudySnacks that would be operated through Davis Library, providing sustenance to students at a more affordable cost.

"It worked a lot like DoorDash," said the UNC junior. "If you were in Davis Library, you could order from anywhere without leaving your seat, and the prices were all cheaper than anything in the vending machines. So we were trying to combat having to get up, maybe forfeiting your seat, and also the absolutely exorbitant prices of Celsius in the vending machine."

But about a month into the business venture, McMichaels received an email from UNC Vending informing him that StudySnacks directly violated the University's exclusive contract with Canteen, a food services company that owns and operates the vending machines across campus.

Hoping to better understand the situation, McMichaels contacted an administrator in the Division of Student Affairs. A few weeks later, he attended a meeting with the administrator.

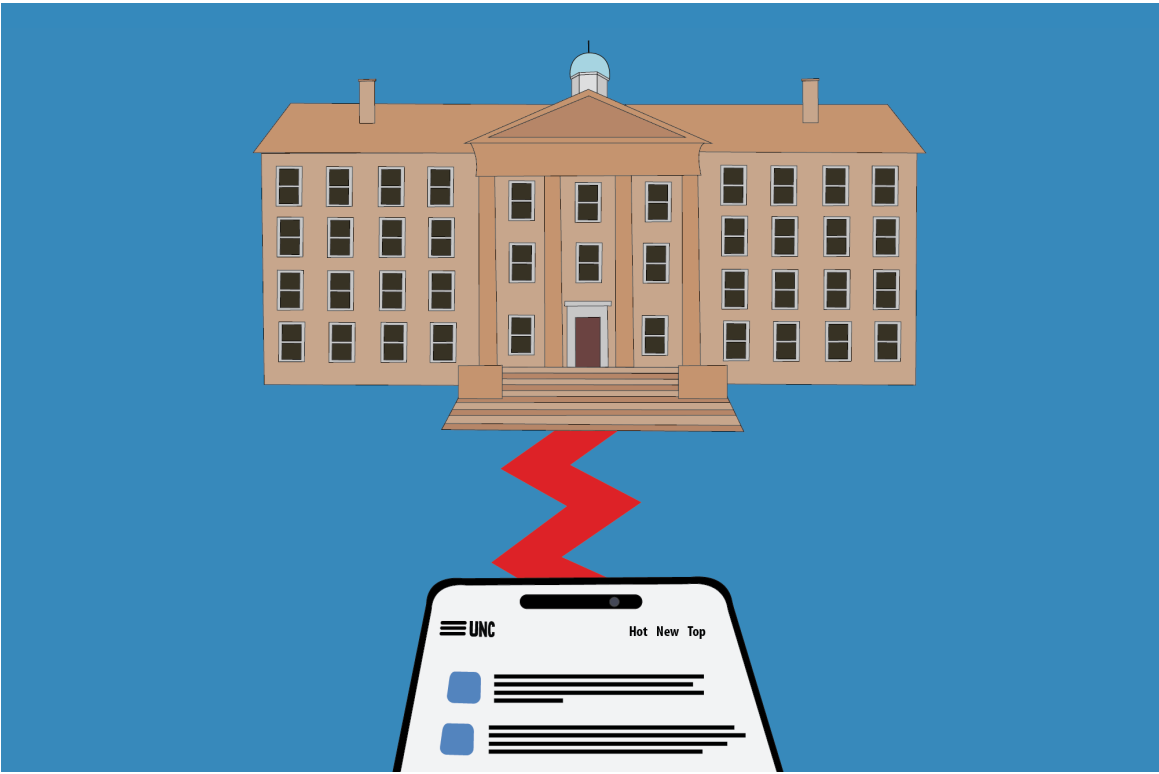
During the meeting, McMichaels said he was presented with a collection of evidence highlighting how his work with StudySnacks had violated the Student Code of Conduct. Among the evidence included was what McMichaels said appeared to be screenshots of a Yik Yak post that he had made.

"It was kind of like a James Bond movie or something," McMichaels said. "They're printed out on pieces of paper, and then the University administrator flipped them around and slid them across the table in front of me, and he's like, 'Is this you?'"

The post was an advertisement for StudySnacks that McMichaels said was meant to appear from the perspective of a customer. McMichaels said the text on the promotion read something along the lines of "If you guys haven't heard of this StudySnacks thing, go check it out."

"The strange thing about it is there was no identifying information as to how it could have possibly been me," McMichaels said. "It was a post pretending to be from just some random students."

McMichaels said the conversation "jolted" him. He stopped running StudySnacks, but he didn't stop thinking about the interaction.



DTH DESIGN/STEPHANIE HUGHES

Although he emphasized that he could only speculate on the situation, McMichaels said he's since wondered how his Yik Yak posts made it into that meeting.

Administrator access to Yik Yak

Yik Yak is a hyper-local, anonymous social media app where users can join communities based on their interests. When college students sign up, they have the ability to join a community exclusively available to their school.

When users create Yik Yak accounts, they agree to the platform's privacy policy and terms of service. Under the privacy policy, Yik Yak collects some amount of personal information, including contact data — email addresses, billing and mailing addresses, school names, phone numbers — as well as device data — IP addresses, mobile device carrier and general location information.

The policy states that Yik Yak may share or use this personal data to comply with laws and legal processes, to protect users' privacy, safety and property and to prevent harmful or illegal activity, among other scenarios.

"Generally speaking, Yik Yak only shares user identity data when it is legally required by a law enforcement subpoena," a spokesperson for Yik Yak wrote in a statement to The Daily Tar Heel.

As such, the spokesperson wrote that how UNC administrators were able to identify McMichaels' post "did not come from official Yik Yak channels." The spokesperson wrote that Yik Yak double checked its legal records from around the time when McMichaels' meeting occurred, but

could not find anything matching the case.

In a statement to The DTH, UNC Media Relations wrote that it was not aware of administrators accessing Yik Yak "for the purposes of content review, communications with students or as it pertains to our Student Code of Conduct or University policies."

However, Media Relations wrote that administrators may view Yik Yak and other social media platforms for purposes related to campus safety, security and operations.

When it comes to conduct-related issues, Media Relations wrote that reporting parties may submit social media screenshots as material to support concerns for misconduct. These reporting parties can include students, faculty and staff.

"Yik Yak maintains their own privacy policy and community guidelines," Media Relations wrote. "If a reporting party were to access the original post in accordance with such policies and submit the information as part of their report, the University would review it along with all evidence surrounding the matter."

Who can be on Yik Yak?

To sign up for Yik Yak, users must input their phone number, age and college email address, which matches users to their school's specific Yik Yak community. When users enter their emails, Yik Yak states that the platform uses the addresses to verify that the user is a college student.

However, Yik Yak's FAQ page states that private college feeds are limited only to "verified .edu emails," which theoretically also includes

University faculty, administrators and staff.

"As with any social media platform, employees of the University acting in an individual capacity, and not on behalf of the University, may use social media," Media Relations wrote.

Communications between staff obtained by The DTH show University officials sharing and discussing Yik Yak posts. In May, administrators emailed about student reaction to the announcement of Alpine Bagel Cafe's closure — citing Yik Yak posts as evidence.

"I'm looking at the Yik Yak messages and, as expected at this point, they're not great," one staff member wrote.

Ryan Tuck, an adjunct media law professor in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media, said he would not be surprised if UNC faculty or staff were using Yik Yak. In fact, given that the terms only require a .edu email to join a college feed, he said he would expect it.

"Frankly, as long as there has been the Internet, there have been people snooping in places that they shouldn't snoop," Tuck said.

Implications for student speech

McMichaels said that following his meeting with an administrator in student affairs, he stopped using Yik Yak for a period. He said he was "pretty shaken up by the whole thing."

UNC senior Piper Westmoreland, who described herself as an almost-daily Yik Yak user, said she thinks the potential monitoring of student speech or posts feels to her like "an infringement."

"It's not like we hold government positions," Westmoreland said. "We're not senators, we're students expressing how we feel about the world around us, and that's totally OK. I feel like it shouldn't affect their academic life. And I mean, there's caveats that go along with it. Yik Yak does have community guidelines that you're meant to follow. And I think if you break them, you get banned, or you might get temporarily banned or whatever, which is fine. But I don't think the University should be policing what every person posts on Yik Yak."

Westmoreland said Yik Yak's anonymity is key to its exchange of ideas — whether that be political discourse or relatable memes — because it allows students to express their opinions more honestly.

"Especially now with the idea of a digital footprint, people are scared sometimes to say what they actually think online and in person because of backlash, because there's always evidence of you saying something," Westmoreland said.

Tuck said this ability for anonymous speech to offer protection from retribution is at the core of why it is constitutionally safeguarded. Anonymous speech is a protected category of speech under the First Amendment.

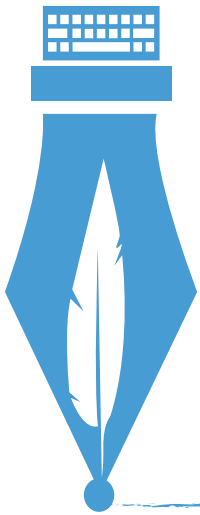
"Anonymous speech was completely prolific at the time of the founding because these were rebels, I guess you would call them," Tuck said. "These were revolutionaries. These were dissidents that were fighting against an extremely powerful and an extremely retributive and literally monarchical power across the Atlantic Ocean. So there were extremely direct and real consequences to going against the royal rule."

Tuck acknowledged that social media has in some ways changed the landscape for anonymous speech — allowing content to spread quicker and reach wider audiences, posing potential threats such as misinformation or harassment. However, he said he thinks the role of anonymous speech in offering protection to those who might otherwise be afraid to speak out is ultimately more important.

This principle, he said, is equally significant for all forms of anonymous speech — even Yik Yak posts, which some might consider "silly."

"The Marketplace [of Ideas] says all content leads to greater enlightenment," Tuck said. "So if allowing me to sound off about my professors or the color of some dress loosens me up mentally or exposes me to points of view or content that ultimately lead to me being a more informed person, then I should do that."

X: @alice__scott



Donate to
The Daily Tar Heel
at [StartThePresses.org](https://startthepresses.org)



Keep Independent
Journalism Alive

COLLEGE MEDIA

More student outlets are turning to their universities for funding

This financial reliance can negatively impact editorial independence

By Aidan Lockhart
Enterprise Editor

It's no secret the world is moving away from traditional news media — professional and collegiate news organizations alike have been grappling with this reality for more than 20 years.

The modern media landscape is changing rapidly and in different ways. Print is in decline as audiences turn to digital alternatives. Advertising revenue is going down. And, according to researchers, this new landscape is a prime environment for censorship — partially due to the Trump administration's restrictive policies and frequent attacks on the press.

These shifts have weakened news outlets nationwide. According to Medill's 2025 State of Local News report, nearly 3,500 newspapers have closed down over the past two decades.

As for many college outlets, the decades of decreasing revenue have resulted in increasing financial reliance on their universities. And when student news organizations aren't financially independent, the possibility of editorial interference is more likely.

Money used to come easier for collegiate newspapers. Bob Buday, a former journalist who researches college media, said that it used to be the case that you could "roll out of bed" and the advertising revenue would be there.

But, he said, that time has passed. With the advent of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter in the mid-2000s, college newspapers began to lose control of the campus news monopoly they'd held for decades. By the 2010s, the print advertising dollars, which had previously dominated their revenue, began to sharply decline. Barbara Allen, a higher education journalism consultant, attributed much of these losses to programmatic advertising.

"Facebook ads, and things like that, started sucking out the ad dollars," she said. "I would describe it as an environment where people who got into student media to do journalism were suddenly faced with much more stark financial realities, which was definitely mirrored by the industry," Allen said.

According to data analysis by the Pew Research Center, advertising revenue for the national newspaper industry dropped by nearly \$40 billion from 2006-2022. At the same time, digital advertising revenue was increasing — from 17 percent in 2011 to 48 percent in 2022.

This shift affected college media, too, according to research by Buday and his colleagues. The researchers studied 49 independent, nonprofit college newspapers, since their finances are public. Though, registered nonprofits only make up a fraction of the estimated 1,000-plus collegiate news organizations in the United States.

Buday's research found that, from 2004-2023, advertising revenue dropped from 97.7 percent to 48.4 percent of total revenue for the average nonprofit paper. Additionally, average overall revenue for these outlets had decreased by over \$550,000 — less than half of the average revenue peak of more than \$1 million in 2006.

With the drastic reduction of most organizations' largest source of income, a scramble for new revenue streams ensued.

Most moved to prioritize online production, where the advertising was more lucrative, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. College students had already largely stopped reading print newspapers — after months away from campus, reading habits only became more and more digital. Many student news organizations either cut down on

print production or stopped printing entirely after returning to campus.

Others launched large-scale fundraising campaigns, while some embarked on non-news endeavors — such as selling merchandise or starting other businesses — to create extra income. But for most organizations, these new sources of revenue weren't enough to compensate for the financial loss of consistent print advertising. As a result, many student papers were forced to turn to their universities for financial support.

Jessica Sparks is a journalism professor at Auburn University who led a study on 512 student news outlets, before and after the pandemic. Her team found that, as of 2023, more than 56 percent of the student news outlets they analyzed received direct or allocated funding from their associated university; they also found a 3.3 percent increase in the average revenue provided by direct university funds.

"To keep the lights on, more of these schools had been willing to take money from institutions," Sparks said.

The study also claimed that direct funding from a college newspaper's university has a significantly negative impact on the "predicted independence" of the student media outlet.

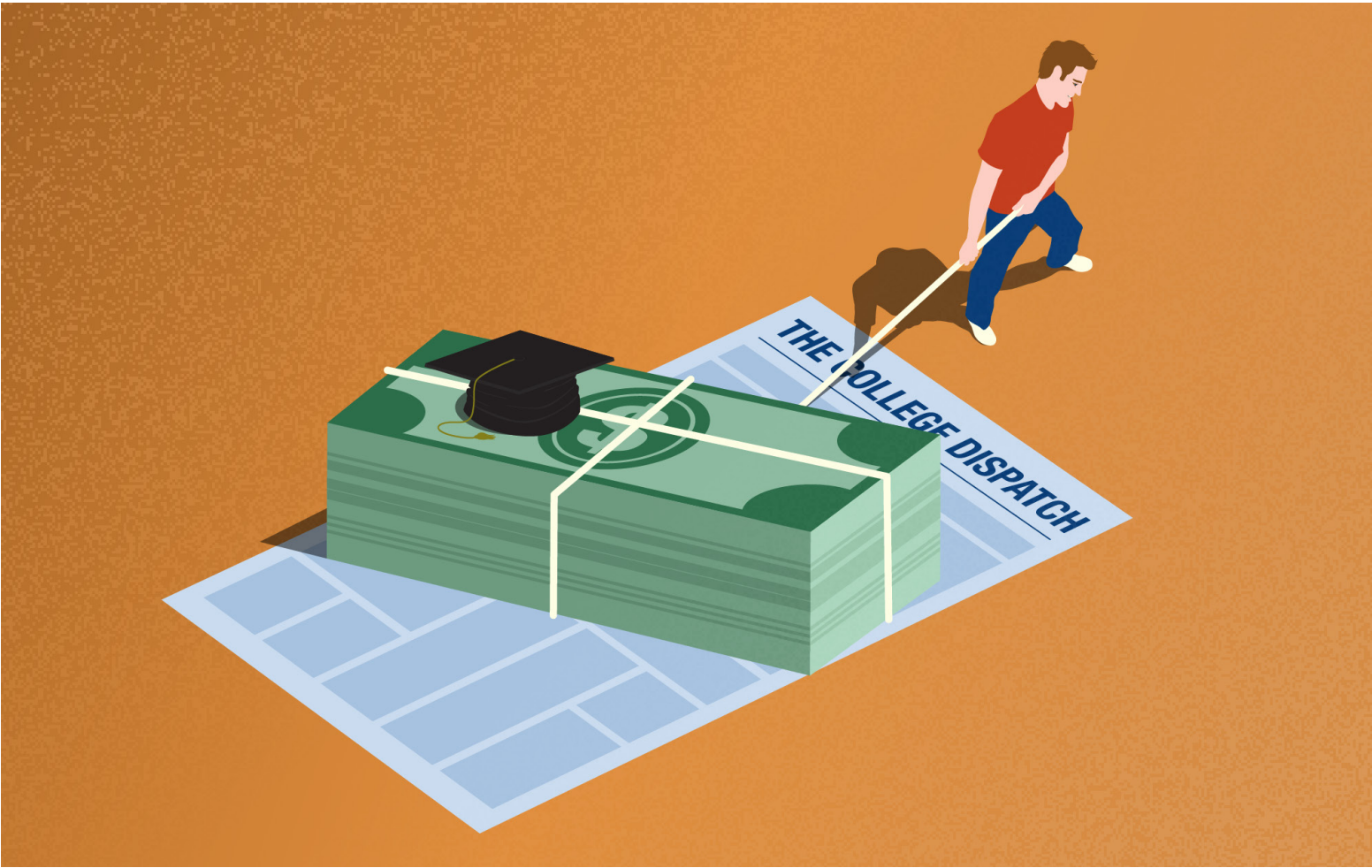
"What we're looking at is how vulnerable are these outlets to being strong-armed into something that the students don't want to do," Sparks said.

Sparks explained that these agreements varied in scope. Some went back to accepting a portion of semesterly student activity fees or tuition. Others received direct, one-time or annual support from their university. One such organization is The Independent Florida Alligator, which covers the University of Florida.

The Alligator has been financially independent since 1973, two years after student editors published an insert in their print paper listing the addresses of known abortion clinics, which, at the time, was a violation of Florida state law. After both UF and The Alligator faced public backlash, the two separated, and the student-run paper became independent.

The Alligator remained free of university funding until 2019. Facing financial difficulties, the paper struck a deal with UF — for the past six years, The Alligator has received an immersion fund between \$50,000 and \$100,000 annually.

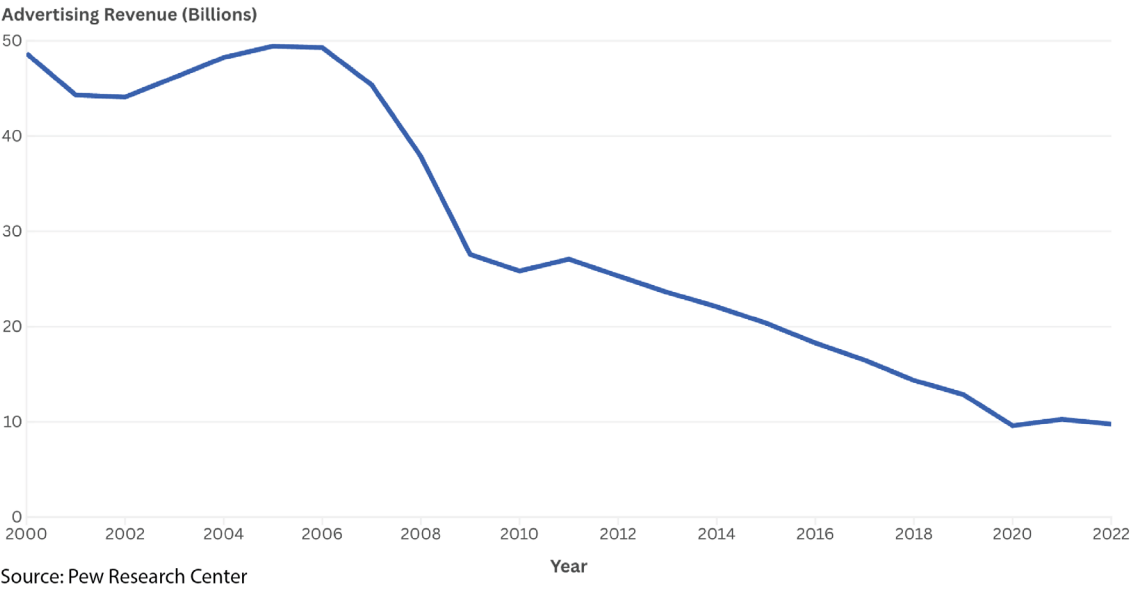
Shaun O'Connor, the Alligator's general manager, said the monetary connection with the school has "absolutely no impact" on the



DTH DESIGN/GRACE DAVIDSON

There has been a sharp decline in newspaper industry advertising revenue since 2006

The estimated advertising revenue fell from \$49 billion in 2006 to \$10 billion in 2022.



DTH DATA/AIDAN LOCKHART

paper's editorial independence. He does acknowledge, though, that they could lose that funding at any moment, potentially as a result of federal funding cuts to universities.

"It's out of our control, and I try to focus on the things that are within my control," O'Connor said. "This agreement will change at some point, I have no doubt, in the future. And if that's used as reasoning for it to change, I won't be surprised at all."

Mike Hiestand, senior legal counsel at the Student Press Law Center, said that while he hasn't yet seen the full-scale impact of funding cuts from the federal government on student media, he does think outlets are preparing for the possibility. What he has seen, though, is a "changing climate" in respect to the role of the press. He said the recent student press controversy at Indiana University Bloomington is indicative of this climate.

While IU's campus news outlet, the Indiana Daily Student, is editorially independent, the university has a say in financial decisions because of the paper's "auxiliary status." In 2024, IU stepped in to cover the outlet's near-\$1 million funding deficit accrued from years of dwindling advertising revenue.

A year later, in October 2025, IU ordered the Indiana Daily Student not to print news in its homecoming special edition. When the outlet's director refused the directive, he was fired, and the university cancelled print production for the Daily Student altogether.

The backlash was swift — within days, the SPLC, the American Association of University Professors and the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression all issued statements condemning the censorship of the Daily Student.

IU's chancellor, David Reingold, reversed course weeks later in a letter to the editors of the IDS, resuming occasional print publication. He wrote that the decision to halt print publication was within the context of an annual deficit of nearly \$300,000 and had "nothing to do with the editorial content of the IDS."

Hiestand said he never would have believed something like this would happen at the IDS, which he called a "powerhouse" of student media programs.

"There's just a changing climate that exists with respect to what the press's role is and what we do," Hiestand said. "We have a president that calls us the enemy of the people, and that has definitely had ripple effects."

According to FIRE's Students Under Fire Database — which relies on publicly available information to document student speech controversies — there were 281 incidents involving "attempts to investigate, censor, or otherwise punish students for protected expression" in 2025. This was a record-high number of reports for the database, which began in 2020.

Notable events include the Indiana Daily Student controversy and the University of Alabama's suspension

of two student-run magazines which didn't comply with "DEI guidance" the university received from the federal government. The magazines, Nineteen Fifty-Six and Alice, focused on Black students and women's issues, respectively.

"I would think it's going to get harder for college newspapers, whose universities worry about getting caught in the crosshairs of the administration," Buday said. "I feel they're going to be under more pressure to watch what they publish."

But the database doesn't only track cases of college media censorship. Other events include the arrest of Columbia University activist Mahmoud Khalil and Weber State University's attempt to limit presentation topics at a conference on censorship. The organization also reported a "surge in attempts by government officials to influence how universities respond to student speech."

Allen said she believes we are living in an "environment that is very friendly to censorship."

"The stage is ripe right now for people to back away from tough stories because of this climate, of this climate that has been engendered by the Trump administration, of reducing press freedoms and minimizing the impact that journalism can have on people," Allen said. "It took a while to trickle down [to college media], but I think we're there."

X: @aidan__lockhart

POLICY

State legislation penalizes wearing face masks in public

House Bill 237 raises accessibility concerns, discourages protests

By Ha Lien Gaskin
Staff Writer

On April 26, 2024, a new neighborhood appeared in the middle of Polk Place. The student organization UNC Students for Justice in Palestine had joined campuses across the United States in erecting an encampment and demanding that the University divest funds from Israel.

Throughout the demonstrations, protesters wore medical face masks and keffiyehs covering their faces.

On June 27, 2024, the N.C. General Assembly overrode former Gov. Roy Cooper’s veto to pass House Bill 237 into law — a move that prohibited the donning of face masks in public, with limited exceptions like preventing the spread of disease. For instance, those who choose to wear a mask to proactively protect their health are not allowed to do so under the new legislation, which Cooper pointed out in his veto.

The law, which was passed along party lines with Republican legislators voting in favor of the bill, also included provisions that increased the penalties for wearing a mask in public, as well as increasing the penalty for blocking roads during a protest.

Across the United States, several states in addition to North Carolina have passed laws prohibiting people from wearing masks in public, including South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama, among others.

Mask bans in North Carolina date back to 1953, when they aimed to discourage membership in the Ku Klux Klan. These laws were loosened in 2020 amid the COVID-

19 pandemic to include exceptions for the purpose of “ensuring the physical health or safety of the wearer or others.”

Republican legislators proposing new, updated bills banning masks across the country frequently mention their concerns about masks being used to conceal the identities of people committing crime as a reason for supporting the bills.

In March 2025, U.S. Rep. Addison McDowell (R-NC 6th) proposed a law at the federal level that would increase penalties for criminals wearing masks while committing crime. The bill has not yet passed through the Senate or the House.

“Free speech doesn’t mean hiding your face while breaking the law,” McDowell wrote in a press release at the time.

Joselle Torres, communications manager at Democracy North Carolina, said the new N.C. law could be harmful to disabled and immunocompromised people and that it has negative implications for the right to protest in North Carolina.

“There’s so many reasons why people need to wear a mask — to protect yourself from any contagious diseases, respiratory infections, pollution in the air,” Torres said. “And what 237 did was weaponize the use of a mask against political protest.”

In the wake of the H.B. 237, Sophia, a former member of UNC Students for Justice in Palestine, said she’s concerned about a rise in doxing — which she defined as “coordinated online harassment campaigns” that often include “threats of physical violence and harm, including death threats.”

As surveillance technology has progressed, advanced tools like AI facial recognition or automated license plate readers have made it



DTH DESIGN/AUBREY WORD

easier for law enforcement to monitor and identify protestors. Jaelyn Miller, a staff attorney at Emancipate NC, said these changes could discourage people from protesting for fear of being targeted.

Kathryn Pollak, community organizer for the grassroots activist group Engaged Defenders 4 Democracy, said the mask ban is a double standard, as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents have been seen wearing face coverings while conducting operations.

“You can’t say that the demonstrators can’t wear masks but ICE officers can,” Pollak said. “So it’s either everybody gets to wear a mask or nobody gets to wear

a mask, but the double standard is really unacceptable.”

Miller said it is unlikely that ICE officers will be prosecuted under the anti-masking law, partly because North Carolina is a Republican-majority state. However, Miller said she is concerned by the increased penalties that these laws impose on regular civilians.

“Weaponization of law enforcement and jail and the criminal process has always been a tactic of the government to suppress dissent,” Miller said. “Thankfully, with the First Amendment there, there’s a way to push back on that. But even just having a criminal case ongoing for a year or two years that’s pending

on your background, that can affect your ability to get employment. It can affect your ability to get housing.”

Amid restrictions, demonstrations such as pro-Palestine protests, the “No Kings” protests and anti-ICE demonstrations remain prevalent. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, 7 million gathered across the country to participate in “No Kings” protests in October.

“Surveillance is definitely a huge — it’s created a bigger risk to protesting,” Miller said. “But at the same time, protesters are brave, right? They’re brave, and they’re doing this for a reason.”

X: @halienwg

LEGACY

What does UNC’s Alumni Free Speech Alliance do?

The independent group was founded to combat campus ‘unrest’

By Kate Markus
Staff Writer

The UNC Alumni Free Speech Alliance is an independent, nonpartisan organization founded in 2021 to combat campus “unrest” related to free speech, according to its website. The alumni-led organization is known for hosting events on campus featuring guest speakers discussing free speech issues and partnering with similar groups, including the Student Free Speech Alliance at UNC-Chapel Hill.

UNC AFSA is one of 27 branches of the broader AFSA network. AFSA exists to preserve the pursuit of truth in American higher education, according to its website.

The organization is particularly involved in current campus free speech debates, Kendall Williams, a UNC alumna and board member of UNC AFSA, said. Williams said she thinks this is due to a broader rise in political polarization.

“It just came to a point where alumni had seen enough, both nationally and at our school specifically,” she said.

Williams said she was motivated to get involved with the organization because of an event she helped lead at the UNC School of Law in 2022, during



DTH FILE/HARRISON LENNON

John Tomasi gives his introductory remarks on a panel about free speech at Philips Hall on Nov. 4.

which guest speaker Jeffrey Ventrella, a constitutional law scholar, was somewhat “shouted down” by attendees.

“Alumni reached out to me [after the event], and they were helpful, so I wanted to do the same thing,” Williams said.

As for the reason alumni are currently mobilizing around free speech controversies, Andy Thomason, assistant managing editor at The Chronicle of Higher Education and a UNC alumnus, said it is partially because everyone is more involved recently.

In the broader conversation about American higher education, Thomason said free speech debates on campus are largely shaped by whether they are public or private institutions. He said this is because public universities are legally bound by the First Amendment — while private institutions, typically, are not.

“I think higher ed was emerging as something of a punching bag back in the early 2010s, but you did not see serious efforts to actually regulate classroom instruction in the way that you’re seeing now, which is a big free speech issue,” Thomason said.

The UNC System recently issued a regulation requiring the public release of syllabuses across system institutions, which some deem a regulation of academic freedom. Many faculty across the system voiced concerns about how inviting outside scrutiny could stifle free inquiry in classrooms due to safety concerns. Others, though, argue that this is a step toward transparency.

UNC law professor Daniel Rice, who teaches First Amendment law, said that when examining what is protected speech or unprotected speech at public universities, viewpoint discrimination is a main consideration.

“The most common understanding [of viewpoint discrimination] is the kind of intuitive one that governments can’t tilt the playing field by prescribing expression in favor of one particular cause or one point of view,” Rice said.

What is considered viewpoint discrimination is not always agreed upon.

In August 2025, University personnel boarded up a Palestinian resilience mural in Hanes Art Center overnight without consulting the Department of Art and Art History at UNC, following orders from administration. Some faculty and students criticized the decision as a “slippery slope” to censorship. Administrators argued that the removal of the artwork was to make space for other viewpoints, and, in fact, promoting viewpoint diversity.

In a statement after the mural’s concealment and eventual removal by administration, UNC AFSA engaged in the conversation and said it did not view these actions as viewpoint discrimination, citing that the artwork was never intended to be permanent.

“We think that compared to its peers — other elite universities, public and private — we think that UNC-Chapel Hill is doing a good job on maintaining an environment for free speech and open discourse,” UNC AFSA Chair John Bruce said.

UNC ranks No. 19 out of 257 schools for its free speech climate, according to the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression’s 2026 college free speech rankings. Although it appears to be above many others, FIRE considers this a C-minus score. The organization also ranks UNC in the bottom 50 for “comfort expressing ideas.”

“A lot of times students are afraid to speak up, and understandably so. As alumni, we’re in a different position — we don’t have this pressure from our peers,” Williams said.

Ultimately, AFSA’s end goal is to promote open discourse, Bruce said, and he encourages all students with diverse perspectives to attend their events.

“Even if I don’t agree with you, I’m going to fight for your right to speak freely, because that contributes to this open forum that we want,” Williams said.

X: @dailytarheel

EDUCATION

School district called to testify over Parents' Bill of Rights

Board member went viral after calling it discriminatory

By James O'Hara
Staff Writer

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools is now required to submit a monthly letter to the N.C. House of Representatives illustrating their compliance with the Senate Bill 49, also known as the Parents' Bill of Rights, after a TikTok of CHCCS board member George Griffin denouncing the law went viral.

On Dec. 10, Griffin and Superintendent Rodney Trice testified to the House's Oversight Committee after Committee Chair and Majority Leader Brenden Jones (R-Columbus, Robeson) alleged the district has not been in compliance with the Parents' Bill of Rights.

Passed in August 2023, the law requires schools to notify parents if their child changes their name or pronouns at school and bans education on gender identity and sexuality to children in kindergarten through fourth grade — among other education policies.

Griffin called this "discriminatory" and suggested that the board not comply with the law in a January 2024 meeting.

During the meeting, the board unanimously voted to update policies in line with S.B. 49. However, they removed the two provisions related to disclosing pronouns and banning education on gender identity, instead providing written guidance to district administrators on how to handle requests for name changes in line with the district's values of protecting students and staff.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVIS LONG/THE NEWS & OBSERVER

N.C. House Majority Leader Brenden Jones holds up the book "It Isn't Rude to Be Nude" by Rosie Hanine while questioning Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools officials during a House committee hearing on Dec. 10.

The board did not approve the provision banning education on gender identity in kindergarten through fourth grade classrooms because they already have a policy that prevents sexual education from entering the curriculum until fifth grade.

CHCCS maintains that their actions are in compliance with state law.

At a school board candidates' forum in September 2025, Griffin was filmed saying the board "said no" to the NCGA's law, removing two provisions that were "blatantly discriminatory."

In October, conservative X account Libs of TikTok posted Griffin's comments, alleging he was bragging about defying the law.

"The House Oversight Committee was really an effort to distract people from the fact that a state budget hasn't been passed."

Allen Buansi
Representative (D-Orange)

This viral clip led to Jones posting on X that Griffin should "be ready to testify before the House to explain why you think you can openly defy state law."

Forty-eight days later and nearly two years since CHCCS acted on S.B. 49, Griffin and Trice were in front of the House Oversight Committee, testifying to the district's compliance with state law.

The hearing resulted in CHCCS being required to document full compliance with the law every month, starting this January.

Rep. Maria Cervania (D-Wake), a member of the Oversight Committee, said the decision to hold a hearing was made by committee leadership, specifically Jones, and was not the view of the entire committee.

She said the hearing was highly unusual, because the chair did not provide the evidence used to the rest of the committee, so they could not fulfill their role in making sure state law was abided by.

"It was highly disappointing, in fact embarrassing, and my colleagues and I, too, apologize for how board member Griffin and Superintendent Trice were treated," Cervania said.

Rep. Allison Dahle (D-Wake), who also serves on the Oversight Committee, said this hearing sets a precedent that the state can force people to testify over clips that were taken out of context.

Griffin's speech was an opinion expressing he didn't want to comply with the law, which the board ultimately voted against, so there was no wrongdoing, she said.

"So now is it every time I say something that doesn't agree with a law or opinion of a Republican who's in power, or anybody in power, does that mean I'm going to be dragged in to testify about what I said at a meeting?" Dahle said. "That to me is an infringement on my right to speech."

Rep. Allen Buansi (D-Orange), who does not serve on the Oversight Committee but represents CHCCS' county, said this hearing was an attempt to distract people from what really matters, as the school system is ultimately compliant with the law.

"This House Oversight Committee was really an effort to distract people from the fact that a state budget hasn't been passed, the fact that people are on the verge of losing their health care," Buansi said. "The way that that committee meeting was conducted was a travesty."

X: @james_hara55885

LABOR RIGHTS

North Carolina teachers cannot go on strike

State law prohibits walkouts, work callouts for public employees

By Brantley Aycock
Senior Writer

In North Carolina, it is illegal for public school teachers to go on strike or participate in collective bargaining.

Educators and other public employees cannot participate in walkouts, callouts or any work stoppages to make demands of their employer, and they cannot negotiate with their employer as a union or labor organization.

On Jan. 7, North Carolina Teachers in Action held a protest across the state. The protestors asked for longevity and master's pay, an end to the pay freeze for mid-year educators, a cap to employee insurance premium increases and an end to pay-based premiums, as well as the reestablishment of retiree health benefits.

Wake County Public School System teacher and organizer of North Carolina Teachers in Action Brandy Sanders said the teachers who protested used their saved personal days to call out of work. She said it was a sacrifice they needed to make to show the community and legislators that they have to make a change.

Sanders said there are teachers who want to walk out and not come back to the classroom for a week to make their voices heard, but this would be illegal.

"It's hard because we aren't allowed to strike," Sanders said. "It's hard because then our hands are tied on what we can do to try to get their attention and let them know that we're exhausted."



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVIS LONG/THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Teachers and educators gather in Cary calling on state lawmakers to provide more federal funding for education on Jan. 7.

Sanders said some teachers are working multiple jobs to make ends meet, and that it is unacceptable that schools do not have the funding to pay teachers a livable wage.

The North Carolina Association of Educators is a union for public school workers. North Carolina Association of Educators President Tamika Walker Kelly said the state laws against striking and collective bargaining are barriers to teachers.

"It makes it harder for educators and other public sector workers to be able to advocate for things that they need as workers and also as one collective voice in order to advocate for their worker rights," Kelly said.

She said teachers have the right to join a union and to comment on school, state and federal policies that affect students and the teachers themselves. Kelly said teachers often speak out on statewide issues, such as the current lack of a state budget, as well as local issues, such as classroom funding.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRAVIS LONG/THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Teachers and educators demonstrate in Cary on Jan. 7 to advocate for expanded teachers' rights in N.C.

Kelly said community members can advocate alongside teachers to bring attention to the challenges they face when teachers are unable to leave the classroom or negotiate themselves.

Public school teachers have the same rights to free speech and protest outside of the classroom as other private citizens do, American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina staff attorney Ivy Johnson said. Teacher protest limitations come into play when they intersect with a teacher's role as a public employee.

North Carolina is an employment-at-will state. Employers can treat employees as they see fit unless there is a specific law in place prohibiting that treatment.

"There are very few worker protections in the public and the private sphere," Johnson said.

Evan Ringel, an assistant professor of media law at Appalachian State University, said the First Amendment is the baseline for free speech in the United States, but North Carolina lawmakers could expand protections if desired.

"The state of North Carolina can't say you have less protection than the First Amendment says, but it can always say you have more, right, so state policymakers can easily choose to affirmatively grant anyone, including teachers, more speech protection if they decided to do so," Ringel said.

North Carolina Teachers in Action will hold protests again on Feb. 7, March 7 and April 7. The April 7 protest will be at the N.C. General Assembly meeting.

Sanders said the community should speak up, reach out to legislators and vote for public officials who support funding public education over private school vouchers.

"We will continue to use all of our tools at our disposal that ultimately will help us bring attention to the fact that we need to change these state laws to make sure that we continue to increase worker power across the state," she said.

X: @dthcitystate

Activist Voices

The Daily Tar Heel

FOLLOW-UP

Where are the April 2024 pro-Palestine protesters now?

36 were detained. Six were arrested. Today, many are still impacted.

By **Dania Al Hadeethi**
DEI Coordinator

and **Keya Mahajan**
Senior Writer

On April 26, 2024, Polk Place was the center of a pro-Palestinian march and the “Triangle Gaza Solidarity Encampment,” lasting five days and garnering nearly 500 protesters from UNC, Duke University, N.C. State University and nearby areas.

The protest came to a violent end after demonstrators brought down the American flag and replaced it with a Palestinian flag on Polk Place.

Police officers knelt on the necks of protesters. A student was dragged away from the flagpole by her hair. A law enforcement official knocked over a barricade which brought a student in a wheelchair to the ground.

Thirty-six protesters were detained and six were arrested, three of whom were UNC students. Police officers injured several students using pepper spray and physical force.

Many students who were punished for their involvement in the pro-Palestine protests continue to feel the effects of the University’s response. These are some of their stories.

Sylvie Tudor

Sylvie Tudor, a Ph.D. candidate at UNC and one of the protesters at the April 30, 2024, demonstration, was impacted by the University’s use of police during the protest.

“Lee Roberts looked me right in the eye as a cop gave me a concussion, and I know he knows who I am, but I haven’t received an apology,” they said.

Many of Tudor’s friends were arrested, a lot of whom were people of color, a part of the LGBTQ+ community, or both. Tudor said the arrests seriously disrupted their lives, and that some of their friends still have not had their records expunged. She said it delayed student’s job prospects and graduations.

Tudor was later doxed online, and said the University did not reach out to them to offer support. They said the University’s use of violence to suppress protesters, and the lack of an apology to students for those actions, was a blatant admission of where UNC’s interests lie – in the



DTH FILE/HEATHER DIEHL

Police remove protesters from the flag pole at Polk Place during the pro-Palestine encampment on April 30, 2024.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SYLVIE TUDOR

Ph.D. candidate Sylvie Tudor speaks through a megaphone during a protest.



DTH FILE/EMMA DENMAN

UNC graduate student Hashem Amireh chants during a “Boycott UNC” demonstration on Nov. 21, 2024.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MATHANGI MOHANARAJAH

Mathangi Mohanarajah is arrested on April 30, 2024.

Trump administration and pursuing their right-wing visions.

When it comes to the legacy of the protesters and activists at UNC, Tudor said that ideally, the University would disclose investments and divestments from holdings in Israeli or Israeli-supporting companies.

“I think to protest on campus is to do so in the hopes and in the belief that there will be students after us, and people after us to carry on that struggle,” Tudor said.

Tudor connected the pro-Palestinian and encampment movement at UNC to the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-apartheid movement and the ongoing struggle for racial justice on campus.

The events that happened, Tudor said, are not about the students,

but are ultimately about Palestine. Tudor said the University response to the protests represent a broader push to stifle activism.

“The moral tides will turn, and they will realize that they were on the wrong side of history,” they said. “And until then, we can’t give up.”

Hashem Amireh

Hashem Amireh, a Jordanian-Palestinian UNC alumnus of the class of 2025, was a Ph.D. candidate at the time of the protests.

He was also president of the Workers Union at UNC and one of the leaders of the campus pro-Palestinian movement. In November 2023, he gave his first speech at a protest and helped develop UNC Graduate Students for

the Liberation of Palestine.

Amireh’s office was in Gardner Hall, near Polk Place, so he was often at the encampment. A few days after the April 30, 2024, protest, UNC suspended him.

Amireh’s suspension was based on two allegations: forceful conduct and providing unauthorized access to a building — Gardner Hall. His suspension was lifted following a hearing, after which he had to go through the honor court adjudication process. He was found not guilty on all counts against him.

Amireh said that a professor in his department provided false testimony against him, though the professor received no disciplinary action.

“I just felt like there were multiple professors in my department who

clearly had it out for me because of my political beliefs,” he said.

After that, Amireh said he felt like he was being pushed out of the department, and made the decision to get his master’s and leave, instead of finishing his Ph.D. program at UNC.

“Maybe in a couple of years I could be making more money if I finish my Ph.D., but it’s not really my main focus in life. I’m doing OK,” Amireh said.

Mathangi Mohanarajah

Mathangi Mohanarajah, another encampment participant who was detained and suspended, said she is still significantly affected by everything that happened during the protest.

She also received a trespassing notice for protesting on Polk Place. Mohanarajah was a senior at the time of the protest, but was on a leave of absence from UNC. After her suspension, she didn’t have the freedom to choose to return anymore. Her and the others that were charged were offered plea deals, which gave them the chance to be reinstated as long as they did not sue the University.

Mohanarajah, already on academic leave, chose not to accept the plea deal because she disagreed with it. She said her suspension was reversed after the University realized she had not received a criminal charge. She re-enrolled at UNC to complete her last semester, although her trespass notice remained and she wasn’t allowed on campus until a week ago.

Mohanarajah said while she was angry at UNC, she felt many sentimental feelings toward her senior year. She said she has many positive memories of the campus space and feels sad that she can’t return.

“I missed all of my friends’ dance recitals and their graduations and all that stuff because I wasn’t allowed on campus that semester,” she said.

Mohanarajah is one of the defendants pursuing a lawsuit against the University for violating her right to protest in a public space. She said the University is “trying to cover up their mess” by attempting to subdue lawsuits with the plea deals.

“I’m feeling very sentimental about my time on campus and very upset,” Mohanarajah said. “But I’m very proud of all the students who are still fighting, even though the institution is going against them.”

X: [@dailytarheel](https://twitter.com/dailytarheel)

ASSEMBLY

‘Know your power’: Local protesters gather for Mobilization Mondays

Grassroots group hosts similar demonstrations across the state

By **Mollie Ray**
Senior Writer

No matter the weather, each Monday morning and afternoon, Chapel Hill residents stand on the corners of East Franklin Street and Elliott Road with signs depicting phrases like “ICE OUT” and “I will not tell my grandchildren I was silent.” These demonstrations, referred to as Mobilization Mondays, are hosted by a group called Engaged Defenders for Democracy.

ED4D, a grassroots organization that practices nonviolent activism, mobilizes individuals to support workers, neighbors, housing and health care.

After the 2024 presidential election, Chapel Hill’s Mobilization Mondays founder Wendy Jebens said she felt scared and despondent. She knew she wanted to do something instead of wallowing in fear, so she began driving from Chapel Hill to Durham on Tuesday mornings to join ED4D in their weekly demonstrations.

Back in Chapel Hill, Jebens said she noticed a few people holding signs on the corners of East Franklin Street and Elliott Road and realized that she could also demonstrate in her own town. One of these people was Mitch Rosen, who had been independently demonstrating at the location since August 2024.

Rosen began demonstrating after seeing that Donald Trump had a chance at being reelected for president, holding a sign that said “Truth or Trump: you can’t have both.”

“I thought that [Trump being reelected] would be a terrible thing, and it made me feel really bad, on an emotional level,” Rosen said. “I was just trying to figure out if there was something I could do that might be helpful to other people, but really something that would be helpful to myself.”

Rosen has attended various events hosted by ED4D, which was where he met Jebens as well as Kathryn Pollak, who has been politically active since she was 17 but said that canvassing during the 2024 election felt different than anything she had done before. This time around, Pollak was met with some resistance.

“I had people yell at me for the first time, and I was like, ‘Woah!’” she said.

Pollak said she decided that only canvassing every four years during presidential elections felt disingenuous, leading her to establish

more demonstrations through ED4D.

ED4D hosts about 20 demonstrations a week in locations throughout North Carolina. These include demonstrations on bridges, human chains and the original Mobilization Monday movement.

Jim Gerard, who has lived in the Chapel Hill area for 40 years, attended his first Mobilization Monday last week. He has attended various other demonstrations in the Triangle.

“I’ve decided the Trump administration has just gone way too far in dismantling our democracy and, now, literally killing people who [Trump] considers the enemy from within,” Gerard said.

Like Gerard, most of the residents who participate in Mobilization Mondays are members of Generation X. There are very few college-aged students attending these events hosted by ED4D.

To help combat this issue, Pollak and her team at ED4D are planning an event for college campuses. Called “Cultivating Courage by Covering Cuads,” the mission of the event is to energize college students and get them registered to vote.

“Start to engage and know your power, because you have a lot of it,” Pollak said.

Rosen said demonstrators want to see more young people on the scene, but they know that many young people feel very tuned out and skeptical of the political system, which can make it difficult.

“I am hopeful that government can be a force for good,” Rosen said. “The people who are younger today are the people who are going to live under whatever that government looks like in five or 10 or 20 years.”

X: [@dthlifestyle](https://twitter.com/dthlifestyle)

LEGISLATION

North Carolinians continue to protest amid stricter regulations

State has enacted three laws restricting right to assembly since 2017

By Jake Williams
Staff Writer

On Feb. 1, 1960, four African American college students sat at a segregated Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro and refused to leave, igniting a sit-in movement that spread nationwide and greatly influenced the Civil Rights Movement. The Greensboro sit-ins cemented protest as a central tool of political and moral expression in North Carolina, a legacy that endures in the state’s robust protest culture today, even as protest laws have become stricter in recent years.

While the First Amendment protects the right to free speech and assembly, those rights are not unlimited under state law. Protesters can face charges under certain statutes, such as those criminalizing obstruction of traffic flow without a demonstration permit and remaining on private property after being asked to leave.

In 2024, multiple protesters on UNC’s campus were arrested on trespassing charges following the “Triangle Gaza Solidarity Encampment.” On April 30, protesters were forcibly removed from Polk Place after being notified by UNC administrators to disperse. Six individuals were arrested, three of whom were UNC students.

The American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina filed a lawsuit on March 11, 2025, challenging UNC’s punishment of certain individuals involved in the encampment, alleging that UNC’s actions against students violate the rights of free speech, due

process and the right to be free from excessive force by law enforcement.

“UNC has a long, storied history of student protest movements, and it does seem to me, just from the research that I have done, that over the last decade, the responses to those protests have become increasingly more severe than they were in the past, and without speaking to everyone who’s participated, I would imagine that has had the effect of preventing some students and just North Carolinians from participating in those protests,” Ivy Johnson, staff attorney for the ACLU of North Carolina, said.

The ACLU of North Carolina’s lawsuit argued in December for their clients — UNC students currently banned from campus — to be allowed back on campus, while the defendants filed a motion to dismiss. They are awaiting a decision from the judges on both motions.

“The responses to those protests have become increasingly more severe than they were in the past.”

Ivy Johnson
Staff attorney, ACLU of North Carolina

Since 2023, the N.C. General Assembly has passed multiple bills that increase penalties for protesters. In 2024, House Bill 237 was passed, which increased punishments for protesters who block traffic and for masked protesters who break any law. This law narrows the health-related exception to wearing masks at protests, requiring that a mask worn must be a medical- or surgical-grade mask. Under this bill, protesters are not allowed to wear a mask and conceal their identity at a protest unless they have a health or religious exemption.

In 2023, North Carolina passed House Bill 40, an anti-riot law that broadened the definition of “riot” and increased penalties for property

damage or actions that risk injury during demonstrations.

The ACLU of North Carolina also filed a lawsuit against this bill, claiming that “multiple provisions of the law, including provisions that could apply to protesters whose own conduct is entirely peaceful, are overbroad and vague and will function to dissuade people from engaging in lawful protest activities.”

“I saw it as a way of trying to suppress people, particularly African Americans and people of color, because these are similar to the laws that they had decades ago, not just one decade, but decades ago, a century ago, to try to keep people, as they would say, ‘in their place,’ people like me, keep us in our places — well, in their minds what our places would be,” N.C. Rep. Renée Price (D-Caswell, Orange) said.

According to the US Protest Law Tracker from the International Center for Not-For-Profit Law, since 2017, North Carolina has enacted three laws that restrict the right to peaceful assembly, compared to surrounding states, like Virginia and South Carolina, who have enacted zero according to the tracker. The neighboring state with the highest amount of restrictive protest legislation is Tennessee, having passed six restrictive laws since 2017.

Despite recent legislative efforts to tighten protest laws, North Carolina continues to see an active and organized protest network in the Triangle and beyond. Organizations like Siembra NC and the Party for Socialism and Liberation’s North Carolina chapters have organized events to protest against U.S. Immigration

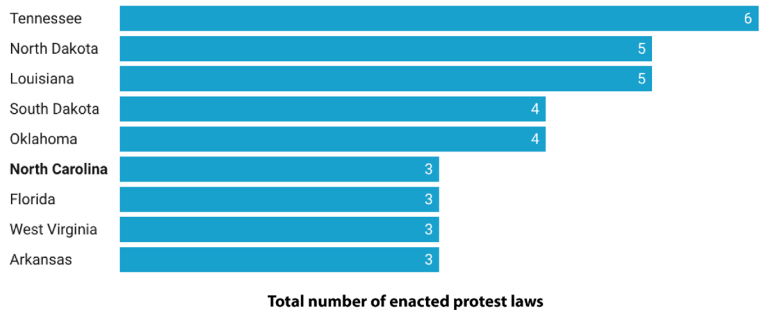


DTH DESIGN/KAITLIN STRATEMEIER

Photos of various protests by Mason Miller, Viyada Soukthavone, Abbey McKee and June Brewer.

North Carolina has the sixth greatest number of enacted restrictive protest laws in the United States since January 2017

There have been three laws restricting protests enacted in North Carolina since 2017.



Source: International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

DTH DATA/CHARLENE WU

and Customs Enforcement, international politics and state legislation in recent months.

“I’m very appreciative when people are speaking out, and I know that I have an important role,” N.C. Sen. Graig Meyer (D-Caswell, Orange, Person) said. “There’s only 50 of us in the Senate. I have to speak up against

authoritarianism and oppression, and sometimes other people are not willing to do that, no matter what party they’re in. And when I see that there are people who are out there supporting me and expecting us to do that, it puts some wind in my sails.”

X: @dthcitystate

ORGANIZING

‘Cyclical’: Student activism at UNC adapts to modern day

Recent University actions elicit more discrete advocacy

By Claire Harutunian
Senior Writer

From the 1960s protests against the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War to this month’s “STOP THE CHOP” protest against the closure of the University’s six area studies centers, UNC’s campus continues to reflect community responses to local, national and international events.

But recently, some campus activists have expressed safety concerns with public organizing and have started using more discrete advocacy methods.

Legacy

Netra Parikh, a UNC junior and co-president of the Campus Y, said UNC’s political scene and long-term grassroots movements are unlike any other university. The Campus Y is a hub for social justice resources and organizing, and she said there are no comparable student-run institutions in the United States.

The other Campus Y co-president, sophomore Lucia Paulsen said advocacy tactics at the University are applied across generations.

“I think ultimately the nature of all organizing and protest is that it is cyclical in some sense,” Paulsen said. “Every act of organization, every protest that you see, is still informed by the past and learning from the past and evolving in order to shift.”

Parikh said two advocacy moments stand out from the



DTH DESIGN/CAMILA GARRIDO

Photos by Viyada Soukthavone, Joseph Moore III, Claire Brennan, Mason Miller and Janet Ayala and courtesy of the 1987 Yackety Yack.

last decade: the 2018 Silent Sam protests leading to the toppling of the Confederate monument on campus and the 2024 “Triangle Gaza Solidarity Encampment.”

Paulsen said the Silent Sam and encampment demonstrations come from years of organizers training students and preparing the community for those moments.

During the 1986 anti-apartheid protests calling for University divestment from South African companies, handmade tent structures called shantytowns were built on Polk Place. Almost four decades later, protesters at the “Triangle Gaza Solidarity Encampment” pitched tents on Polk Place and advocated for the University’s divestment from Israeli or Israeli-supporting companies.

When law enforcement disbanded the encampment in April 2024, 36 protesters — both affiliated and unaffiliated with the University — were detained and six of those 36 were arrested. One officer grabbed a protester by their hair and knocked another protester, who uses a wheelchair, to the ground. Following the encampment, the University administration briefly closed the Campus Y building, citing security concerns. Parikh said this is a recent memory, and some students now don’t feel comfortable engaging in protests.

Organizing methods

Sunrise UNC, a chapter of a national environmental justice

organization, has hosted meetings in the Campus Y building and a thrift sale, along with traditional protests, in the past year. Hannah Hayes, campaign coordinator for Sunrise UNC, said the group doesn’t start by “jumping to the most extreme thing.”

“So we kind of are trying to come at it from all angles of pressuring the decision makers to make better decisions, and then also providing support to people who are negatively impacted by some of those decisions or by some of that lack of action,” Hayes, a UNC sophomore, said.

Greg Gangi first came to UNC as a Ph.D. student in 1991 and has been a professor since 1999. He said the turnout that he saw for the Student Environmental Action Coalition at UNC in the 1990s and 2000s no longer exists. Gangi serves as the associate director for Clean Technology and Innovation in UNC’s Institute for the Environment.

Gangi said he first thought the Great Recession from 2007-09 made students less willing to lead advocacy organizations because they were concerned about future job access. Now he said he thinks students spend hours on social media, which can lower participation in environmental groups.

“I think activism, what I’ve seen today, especially around climate activism, is much more performative,” he said. “It’s about getting likes on social media, rather than persuading people and making a difference.”

Surveillance

Paulsen said there is a balance between using social media as a

strong organizing tool and keeping the community safe. Paulsen and Parikh decided not to make a social media post introducing the Campus Y executive board due to concerns from the student leaders.

Last January, a now-graduated UNC student lost her Morehead-Cain Scholarship following activism on campus and related disciplinary and criminal charges. The disciplinary charges and all but one of the criminal charges were dropped. In August, students who contributed to a pro-Palestine mural in Hanes Art Center saw their work covered and then taken down by the administration without any prior notice.

“I think that for a lot of students, there is a fear about being public with any kind of organizing work,” Paulsen said.

In recent years, the University’s Enterprise Camera Oversight Committee added additional cameras and introduced mobile camera trailers on campus. UNC Chief of Police Brian James has attributed some of these security changes to the 2023 shooting and killing of associate professor Zijie Yan in Caudill Laboratories.

Hayes said increased surveillance from the University and the federal government has made students more afraid to organize.

“But I think even with the surveillance and even with this fear, it hasn’t deterred us from the work we’re doing, and I think that’s what’s most important,” Hayes said.

X: @dailytarheel

Faculty & Staff Voices

The Daily Tar Heel

EMPLOYMENT

Professor turnover has decreased to pre-COVID levels

Still, a DTH survey revealed some are dissatisfied

By Jessica Baugh
Senior Writer

When Deb Aikat first became a professor at UNC, he didn't have to worry about what he taught in his classes. He said most of his colleagues came to the University because they thought it was the best place to work.

Now, more than 30 years later, he said some things have changed.

"Now, with every petition I sign or everything I do, I have to be very careful because there are people who are watching you, and that's not a good feeling," said Aikat.

The Daily Tar Heel conducted an anonymous survey of UNC faculty during the fall semester. Of the validated respondents, roughly one-quarter said they are planning to seek employment elsewhere in the next year. The results suggest unease among some faculty despite recent University data showing faculty turnover at UNC has been decreasing in recent years.

The data

Of the 111 faculty members who responded to the survey, 30 said they are considering seeking employment elsewhere in the next year, while 81 said they are not. The remaining respondents chose not to answer the question.

In written responses, several faculty who said they are not seeking new employment said they would leave, but are planning to retire soon. One respondent said the political climate and their salary would have led them to leave if they weren't retiring soon.

Others said they are not currently job searching, but would consider leaving under different circumstances, including if they received an outside offer.

For those who said they are considering seeking employment elsewhere, the most common reasons were the current political climate or state of academic freedom. When asked if they would recommend UNC as a desirable place to work in their field, 32 percent of responding faculty said no.

In written responses to the question, even some faculty who said they would recommend UNC expressed reservations about the University's direction or workplace



DTH DESIGN/GRACE DAVIDSON

climate. Others said they would hesitate to recommend UNC to colleagues despite planning to stay.

According to a 2024 presentation to the UNC System Board of Governors, voluntary faculty turnover across the UNC System averaged about 3.7 percent in 2023 and remained lower than national benchmarks for comparable public universities.

Faculty turnover at UNC has been decreasing since the end of the pandemic, according to data from UNC Media Relations. The percentage of "Non-Retirement Voluntary Separations" has decreased from about 6 percent during the 2021-22 academic year to less than 3 percent during the 2024-25 academic year.

In a statement, Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs Giselle Corbie said UNC remains focused on retaining faculty and is committed to addressing faculty concerns.

"Carolina faculty are among our most valued assets and play a critical role in the success of our

institution," Corbie said. "Retaining faculty at UNC-Chapel Hill is essential for upholding the highest standards in academic programs, sustaining research excellence and supporting student achievement."

'Ready for a change'

Jan Hannig, chair of UNC's Department of Statistics and Operations Research, said decisions about whether faculty stay at UNC or leave are often shaped by a range of personal factors, including family or their work preferences.

That perspective was echoed in responses to the faculty survey, with one faculty member citing having children in the local schools as the reason they plan to remain at UNC.

"Sometimes people can be just ready for a change," Hannig said. "Some people just are restless, and they don't stay anywhere more than 10 years."

When a professor receives an outside offer, UNC can present a retention offer. Hannig emphasized that these offers can influence a faculty member's decision to remain at the University.

Hannig said retention offers are a routine part of academic employment and often the primary way faculty receive a substantial raise.

"It's usually people who are very high performing, getting a lot of research and papers published, a lot of grants funded, and a different department decides they want to recruit this person," Hannig said.

Hannig said a faculty's experience at UNC can also vary widely by discipline. He noted that his department has grown in recent years, adding faculty in response to increased demand in statistics and rising student enrollment.

He said that growth may insulate some departments from pressures felt elsewhere on campus.

"Statistics is more technical, less affected by the political winds," he said. "So maybe that's another thing that makes us less worried."

In the Hussman School of Journalism and Media, Aikat said he has seen the impacts of shifts in federal priorities and funding changes on faculty.

In September 2025, The DTH reported that 118 federal grants at UNC had been terminated and \$38.4 million had been lost as a result. Aikat said the lack of financial support from grants has heavily impacted professors doing research.

He also said the elimination of certain diversity-related programs has contributed to uncertainty, particularly for faculty whose teaching or research focuses on those areas.

"Diversity has been scrubbed, so a lot of programs have been canceled," Aikat said. "So it creates a chill factor, and that chill factor doesn't give you a very comfortable feeling to work."

others see the current climate as part of the responsibility of working at a public university.

"Don't get me wrong, while some faculty members are not very happy, other faculty members see it as a challenge to combat that kind of political overreach," Aikat said. "They will oppose, because faculty members feel that they are training the younger generation, and so they want to keep on the fight."

However, Belle Boggs, the president of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Association of University Professors, said academic freedom, which many survey respondents cited as a concern, is a necessary job requirement for professors.

"I have no judgment for anyone who leaves because they feel they can't do their work here," Boggs said.

She said the decision to leave can be especially difficult for faculty who have built long careers at an institution, but she emphasized that the responsibility lies with universities to create environments where faculty are able to teach, research and speak freely.

She said faculty losses can have lasting consequences, particularly when experienced faculty are replaced with young faculty members or not replaced at all.

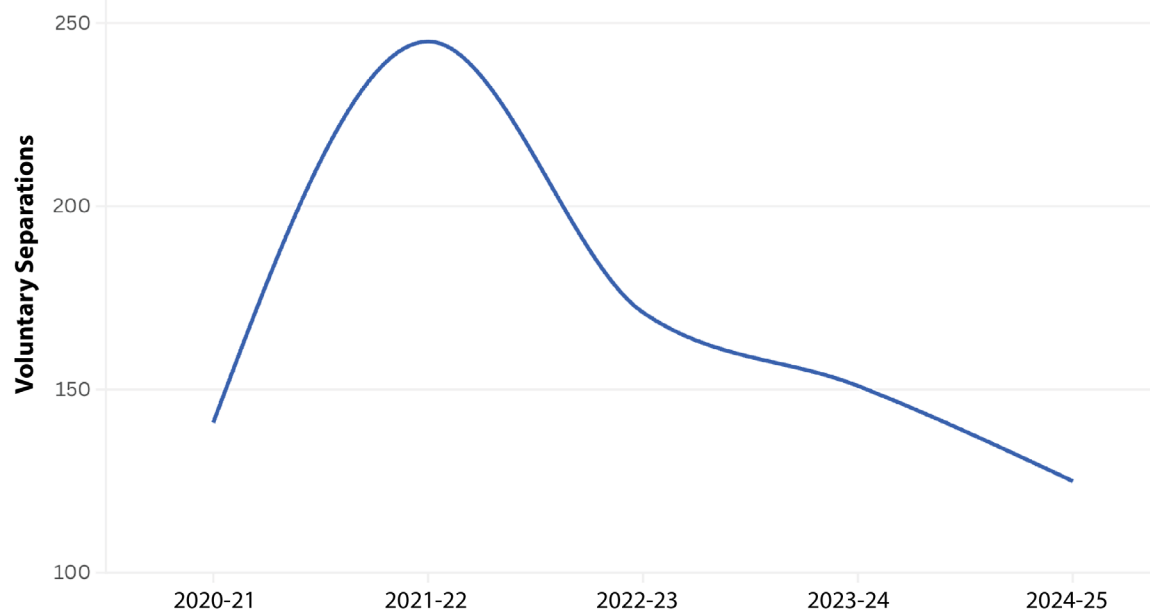
"When you lose an experienced faculty member who has been there for a while, it can be very damaging," Boggs said. "Who's going to be there to mentor the new faculty members?"

At the same time, Boggs said those consequences do not outweigh the importance of faculty members feeling secure in their work.

"When people don't feel safe, if they don't feel like they can do their research, I don't see how they can stay," she said.

Faculty turnover has returned to normal levels after the COVID-19 pandemic

Voluntary separations peaked during the 2021-22 academic year.



Source: UNC Human Resources • Data excludes retired faculty

DTH DATA/AIDAN LOCKHART

Academic Freedom Concerns

Aikat said that while some faculty are considering leaving,

X: @dailytarheel

PROFILE

Professor Daniel Muñoz encourages discussion, disagreement

His no-device policy and engaging lectures foster classroom dialogue

By Jessica Baugh
Senior Writer

When Daniel Muñoz taught his first class at UNC, he said he quickly realized the wide variety of perspectives and eagerness to learn that his students brought to their discussions.

“I had Trump supporters, and I had a self-identified Communist,” Muñoz said. “So it was really the full wide range of political views in that class.”

The course was a gateway class for UNC’s philosophy, politics and economics minor, focused on questions of freedom, rights, equality and prosperity.

Students often vehemently disagreed with one another, Muñoz said, but rather than viewing that as an obstacle, he saw it as the foundation of the course. His goal is to help students talk through disagreements respectfully and understand views different from their own.

His approach is inspired by philosopher John Stuart Mill, who argued that people better understand their own beliefs by engaging with opposing ideas.

He said he encouraged students to take one another’s views seriously and to avoid “cheap shots” and was surprised by how quickly they took on the challenge.

“There’s this myth out there that contemporary college students are close-minded and they only want to be reinforced in their own views, or they’re just receptacles for brainwashing,” Muñoz said. “In my experience, this is totally untrue.”

One student was so generous with his questions and contributions when considering others’ ideas that another student asked to donate her extra credit to him at the end of the course, Muñoz said.

“I think they get enough shallow, status-obsessed dunking and sniping in the rest of their lives,” Muñoz said. “If you just give them any opportunity to build something else, they’ll take it.”

‘A chance to turn down the temperature’

Muñoz is a professor in UNC’s philosophy department and a core faculty member in the PPE program, which had 500 declared minors in the spring of 2024, according to the PPE website. He said the course discusses topics like taxation, capitalism and free speech.

He said his emphasis on class discussions is grounded in the idea that higher education is a place where students are expected to seriously engage with views that contradict their own beliefs.

“In 2026, when we talk about politics, it’s almost always emotionally charged and tied to your group identity,” Muñoz said. “When you step back a little bit and connect these debates over taxes or policing or immigration to big picture philosophical debates, it’s a chance to turn down the temperature and think more analytically.”

That shift in perspective is reinforced by the course’s structure. Rather than presenting a single idea, Muñoz assigns readings that place arguments in direct conversation, and sometimes in contradiction with one another, student Sophia Bahna-Neta said.

Bahna-Neta, a sophomore from Durham with a PPE minor, said his approach helped her understand how conflicting ideas could coexist without one being right or wrong.

“It makes me more aware of the fact that people, educated people, can have strong opinions, and they might be wrong about something,” Bahna-Neta said.

Kendall Baker, a doctoral candidate in UNC’s philosophy department who served as a teaching assistant for Muñoz, said the structure also shaped how discussions unfolded in class. Even if she anticipated a topic would be controversial, Baker said class discussions felt like interesting conversations about different arguments or points of view, not heated debates.

Muñoz’s courses are often large lectures with about 200 students. To create these discussions, he often pauses during lectures and encourages students to share their thoughts with



DTH/JUNE BREWER

Professor Daniel Muñoz sits for a portrait outside of Hamilton Hall on Friday.

those around them and then with the rest of the room, Baker said.

Bahna-Neta said she was often surprised by how engaged the class was for a lecture of that size. Part of how Muñoz accomplished this, she said, was through a strict no-device policy.

“Honestly, I was surprised how much more engaged I felt in Daniel’s class than I guess in a lot of my other classes,” Bahna-Neta said.

An environment of engagement

Sustaining a high level of engagement requires more than carefully chosen readings or a strict no-device policy. Muñoz said it also relies on how students are encouraged to interact with one another.

The biggest hurdle is the fact that no student wants to be embarrassed, Muñoz said. To encourage students to speak despite this concern, he sets expectations early that emphasize engagement and effort.

“You don’t just get credit for tearing people down, and if you get challenged and you do something with it, that’s credit to you,”

Muñoz said. “So challenges are opportunities, and helping others is not going to hurt you.”

Above all, Muñoz said the most vital part of creating an engaging environment is earning students’ trust.

To do this, he said, you have to know the material inside and out, not have too much of an ego and be willing to admit when you don’t know the answer to a question.

“I’ll sometimes get questions from students that are really excellent and surprising, and I think nothing kills a conversation more than faking that you know the answer,” he said.

Bahna-Neta said Muñoz’s classroom environment and office hours, which he hosted at Carolina Coffee Shop, felt like places where participation wasn’t risky.

“I was never afraid to ask him questions about stuff that I didn’t understand,” she said.

Baker said this environment also led to students introducing perspectives that were very different from what she had previously considered due to their unique experiences.

She said Muñoz’s approach, which she said is very engaging, has influenced her own teaching.

“I try to keep in mind when I teach, like maybe I do think this paper is really boring, but if I present it like it’s the most exciting thing in the world, I’m going to get engagement from my students,” Baker said.

Accountability through disagreement

Muñoz said that over nearly five years of teaching at UNC, only a small number of students have been combative or unwilling to engage with ideas that conflict with their own.

He said the willingness to engage seriously with opposing views allows students to test out their own beliefs in an environment where they don’t feel threatened, while also holding one another accountable.

“Even if you’re correct today, if you’re not correctable, if you’re not accountable to the facts, you’re going to be wrong pretty soon,” Muñoz said.

That process, he said, depends on constant exposure to disagreement, the same kind of disagreement students are asked to navigate in his classroom.

“The only way to be held accountable is if there’s somebody out there that wants to hold you to account,” Muñoz said. “It’s probably somebody that genuinely disagrees with you.”

Muñoz said creating and maintaining that kind of space can be a challenge, particularly as universities and professors face increasing public scrutiny and concerns about freedom of speech.

In principle, it is not bad to be under scrutiny, he said, especially since professors at public universities are public employees. However, he said even as they are reformed, universities should be protected.

“I think that there’s probably no value that we take for granted more easily when we have it than freedom,” Muñoz said. “It’s like the water that you swim in or the air that you breathe, and suddenly people in the world today are finding themselves choking.”

X: @dailytarheel

INSTITUTIONAL NEUTRALITY

UNC employees weigh consequences of speaking freely

Staff members have fewer protections for on-the-job expression

By Kayla Bradshaw
Senior Writer

As a public university, UNC is bound to honor free speech protections for all students, faculty and staff. But often, University employees’ speech on the job is more limited than others on campus.

University policy states that UNC seeks to embrace the “expressive conduct” of all students, staff and faculty on campus. While this affirms staff members’ First Amendment rights, concerns remain about how employees experience those protections in practice.

Faculty and staff serve two different purposes at the University, Employee Forum Chair Rebecca Howell said. Faculty are hired to teach students and engage in the exchange of ideas, while staff are employed to carry out specific roles within their departments, she said.

Faculty at UNC operate under the protections of academic freedom. They have the right to be “responsibly engaged in efforts to discover, speak and teach the truth,” according to University policy.

Staff are not expected to speak publicly in the same way that faculty are, Howell said, and as a result, staff



DTH DESIGN/AUBREY WORD

are required to follow a different set of rules.

When speaking in an official capacity, staff and faculty must also adhere to UNC’s policy on institutional neutrality, UNC Media Relations wrote in a statement to The Daily Tar Heel.

Howell said her ability to speak publicly depends on the role she is acting in.

As Employee Forum chair, she is able to speak freely as a representative of staff. However, in her role as director of global opportunities at the UNC School of Law, she said she cannot publicly address issues without guidance or approval from a communications team. Doing so would mean speaking on behalf of the school, she said, and it is important that

her statements align with the school’s mission.

To comply with institutional neutrality, Media Relations wrote that any employee speaking on behalf of “the University, a school or department” is asked to coordinate with University Communications.

In The DTH’s efforts to gather staff perspectives, multiple staff members declined to comment on issues related to free speech at the University, citing concerns about maintaining job security. Staff members do not receive tenure, and, depending on the type of employee they are, some do not have assured job protections.

An SHRA (subject to the N.C. State Human Resources Act) employee has slightly more protection, but an EHRA (exempt from the Human Resources Act) employee can be fired any given day with no reason necessary. Howell said employment status, in addition to how valued an employee feels in their workplace, both factor into whether an employee feels comfortable speaking out.

Off-duty expression is generally protected, but recent events have heightened concerns among employees at UNC, Howell said. Last semester, professor Dwayne Dixon was put on administrative leave — and later reinstated — while UNC investigated him for the alleged

advocacy of “politically motivated violence” on his own time.

At the national level, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2006 (Garcetti v. Ceballos) that public employees are not protected by the First Amendment when speaking in accordance with their official job duties. However, employees may speak as private citizens on matters of public concern, as long as the speech occurs on their own time and does not involve internal workplace duties or disputes.

Howell said the “lack of process” that many felt characterized Dixon’s suspension led staff members to reconsider their social media presence. Dixon agreed that his suspension frightened many people within the University. While he said he cannot speak on behalf of staff members, he acknowledged he sees a difference between staff and faculty when it comes to their expression.

“I do know that staff are more hesitant to organize publicly, like showing up to a protest, they have less protections than faculty, and that makes them more hesitant to publicly appear,” Dixon said. “That’s pretty profound.”

Ryan Tuck is a professor in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media. He teaches classes in media law, which focus heavily on the First Amendment. Tuck said that when it comes to the First Amendment,

there is “what the law says, and then there’s what the law does.”

It is important to note that the University cannot enforce content-based restrictions of speech, Tuck said. In practice, this means UNC cannot dictate what an employee says, but if reasonable and necessary, UNC can dictate when and where they say it.

UNC’s Freedom of Speech and Expression University Standard states that “students, staff, and faculty may assemble and engage in spontaneous expressive activity as long as such activity is lawful and does not materially and substantially disrupt the functioning of the University.”

Tuck explained that conversations on work time or as a work representative that are controversial, political or harmful to the University can be grounds for discipline because they interfere with a peaceful work environment.

UNC’s policies do affirm staff members’ First Amendment rights. However, employees’ obligations to “institutional neutrality” and limited job protections combined with recent speech-related controversies have left some reconsidering not whether they are legally allowed to speak, but whether they can afford to face potential consequences.

X: @dailytarheel

WHAT GOES UNSAID

Anonymous survey reveals UNC faculty culture of self-censorship

By Aidan Lockhart, enterprise editor

Last semester, The Daily Tar Heel surveyed faculty members on free speech and satisfaction with the University.

The anonymous survey received 111 verified faculty responses. While the trends in the survey responses point to growing concerns among faculty, The DTH only heard from about three percent of faculty members at UNC.

However small, that three percent had a lot to say. Faculty expressed a range of opinions on the state of free speech at UNC and their satisfaction with the University's defense of higher education. And while the responses weren't all one-sided, a majority of the answers reflect an environment of fear, self-censorship and a lack of trust in University administration.

Multiple faculty members expressed hesitancy about filling out the survey itself. Of the 111 verified respondents, more than 65 percent said they feel their freedom of speech is limited on campus.

Of those in the minority group, some said they feel they can speak more freely than ever.

"I am able to express anything in the scope of opinions that would occur to me to utter," one wrote. Another responded: "I have never felt that I need to watch what I say beyond the normal consideration of others' feelings and the responsibilities I have to students to not be partisan."

A majority of the surveyed faculty, though, described an acute environment of self-censorship in which faculty members intentionally avoid controversial topics in their classes, or even in conversations with their peers, for fear of repercussions. Some said they worry they could be punished even for teaching in ways they feel are unbiased.

One faculty member wrote that their self-censorship on potentially divisive topics "robs" their students of a full education. Another wrote that they "feel limited in [their] ability to discuss important though controversial topics in my class."

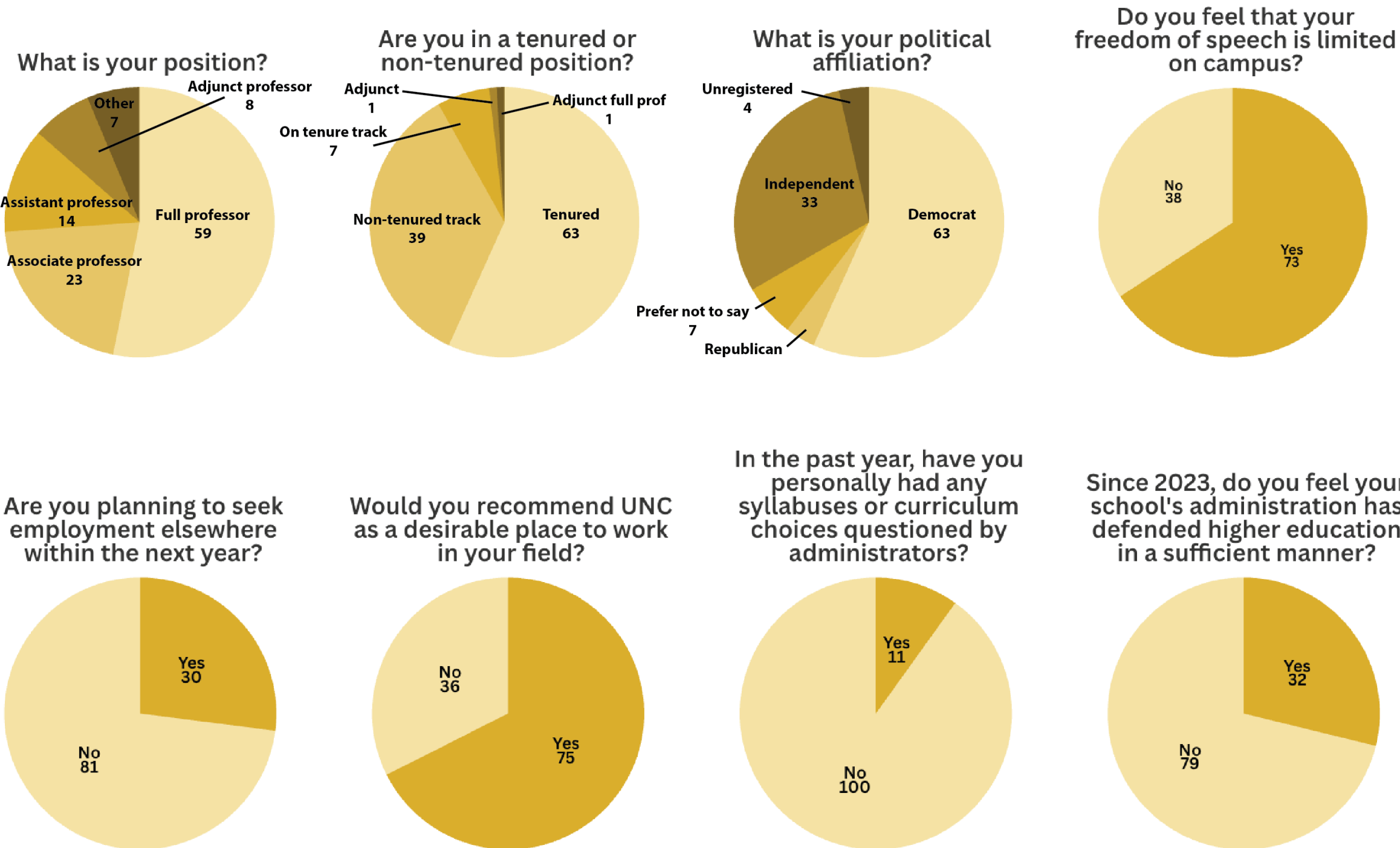
UNC Chair of the Faculty Beth Moracco said it is a concern that faculty are self-censoring themselves because it could create a "chilling effect" on the range of discussions that can happen at the University and in classrooms.

Matthew Boedy, a member of the Georgia chapter of the American Association of University Professors, has been conducting his own surveys of faculty at colleges across the South, including UNC, for the past few years. In the press release for the 2025 survey, Boedy wrote that the findings highlight a widespread climate of fear and anxiety among faculty.

"I do think there is an unwillingness by faculty to speak," Boedy said in an

The Daily Tar Heel faculty survey results show that a majority of UNC faculty feel that their freedom of speech is limited on campus

A majority of respondents said that they did not feel like UNC's administration has defended higher education in a sufficient manner.



Source: DTH Faculty Survey

interview with The DTH. "They don't post, they don't want to talk to media, they certainly don't want to talk about their research, if it's controversial."

UNC faculty are not alone — research suggests that the culture of self-censorship described by Moracco and Boedy is felt among college faculty across the country. A 2024 survey conducted by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression collected more than 6,000 responses across 55 universities and found that 27 percent of faculty said they feel unable to speak freely for fear of

how students, administrators or other faculty would respond.

The report also summarizes data for individual colleges; UNC professors accounted for 145 of the responses to FIRE's survey. The survey asked faculty how often, on campus, they felt they could not express their opinion because of how others would respond. 32 percent responded "never" or "rarely," 40 percent responded "occasionally" and 27 percent responded "fairly often" or "very often."

And though this data suggests that nearly 70 percent of faculty

are, at least occasionally, censoring themselves, other data on student perceptions of free speech paints a slightly more optimistic picture.

FIRE also conducted a survey of nearly 70,000 students to compile its 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, in which UNC ranked 19 out of 257 colleges and universities — up 43 spots since 2025. Though 54 percent of students polled said they had self-censored on campus "at least once or twice a month."

Moracco said that while this self-censorship may be

conscious or unconscious, it still has an impact on the types of conversations that can happen on campus.

"I admit that I sometimes will second-guess myself," she said. "Should I actually say this in a public forum? You know, who might be listening? How could it be misinterpreted, or taken out of context, I think, is often a fear."

Moracco said this fear is related to events at universities across the country, in which faculty have been harassed or lost their jobs because of things they've said. She also mentioned issues with

faculty being recorded without their knowledge, something that happened at UNC less than two years ago.

In April 2024, Kenan-Flagler Business School professor Larry Chavis received an email informing him that the Office of the Undergraduate Business Program had "received some reports concerning class content and conduct" in his classes. Senior Associate Dean for Faculty and Research Christian Lundblad informed Chavis that, to investigate these concerns, the University

had recorded four of his classes without his knowledge.

UNC didn't have an explicit policy on recording faculty at the time — though there is one currently in progress — and deferred to North Carolina's one-party consent law. Chavis' contract with UNC was not renewed at the end of the spring 2024 semester, and the event left many faculty feeling worried that they could be recorded in their classrooms.

"Knowing that the University can record our classes without our consent, being told we should not discuss the reality of racial

injustice or the importance of diversity — these limit our ability to speak truth," one survey respondent wrote.

But the fear of being recorded isn't only about the cameras installed in almost every classroom at UNC — many faculty, including some survey respondents, are even fearful of being recorded and reported by their own students. In September 2025, a Texas A&M University professor was fired after a student recorded her teaching material that the student claimed was illegal, per an executive order by President Donald Trump, which withdrew federal recognition for transgender individuals.

Michael Palm, president of the UNC AAUP chapter, said there is an ongoing and accelerating movement to intimidate faculty by right-wing groups like Turning Point USA.

"[UNC has] demonstrated time and again that they have absolutely no interest in doing anything to protect faculty from the increased intimidation and increased scrutiny and increased attacks that faculty are under," Palm said. "And at times, they've even enabled those attacks, most dramatically with the recent syllabus policy."

In December, the UNC System enacted a new policy that will require faculty to post their syllabuses online. Syllabuses had been a topic of much debate at UNC since the Oversight Project, a conservative-leaning subsidiary of the Heritage Foundation, filed a public records request for faculty syllabuses that contained keywords like "DEI" and "anti-racism."

In August, UNC's public records office denied the request and asserted that syllabuses are the intellectual property of the person who prepared them. Moracco said there was a widespread sigh of relief when the decision was announced. Multiple survey respondents approved of UNC's decision to protect faculty's syllabuses at the time (the survey period had closed by the time the System's new policy was passed).

Since the decision was made, faculty have expressed worries that their syllabuses being publicly available could lead to them being "doxed" for containing content that doesn't align with recent anti-DEI legislation.

Moracco said that faculty being stifled in terms of what they can teach or say is detrimental to student learning.

"If our focus is being that number one public institution, you know, we're endangering that with this climate," she said.

The DTH requested comment from Chancellor Lee Roberts or any other member of the University administration, but they did not respond by the time of publication.

X: @aidan_lockhart

We conducted an anonymous survey of UNC faculty. Here's how we did it.

By Aidan Lockhart, enterprise editor and Lauren Rhodes, senior writer

The Daily Tar Heel conducted an anonymous survey, open to all faculty and instructors at UNC. The survey was published in September and ran until the end of the fall 2025 semester.

We made our best effort to distribute the survey to all faculty across UNC. In September, we sent the link to every department chair and asked them to share the survey with their faculty. For the rest of the semester, we periodically emailed the survey directly to faculty members who had publicly available email addresses, which we obtained via UNC's department and school websites.

By the end of the semester, we received 121 responses. Though the survey was anonymous, we required faculty to provide their PID so we could verify that all respondents were real faculty members at UNC.

Of the responses we received, eight were removed because they did not provide a valid PID. Two more were removed because they were duplicate PIDs — in these cases, only the first responses were retained. By the end, we received 111 total verified responses.

About 52 percent of the respondents were full professors and nearly 57 percent were tenured. Both of these percentages are significantly higher than the actual makeup of UNC faculty; of the 4,538 full- and part-time faculty members at UNC (as of 2025), about 32 percent are full professors and 31 percent are tenured.

A majority of the sample self-identified as being a Democrat or an independent — 56.8 and 29.7 percent, respectively — while only 3.6 percent identified as being Republican. The remaining respondents were either unregistered or opted not to share their political affiliation.

While our goal was to survey a representative portion of the faculty, we acknowledge that a sample size of less than three percent of the faculty is far too small to draw conclusions from. We also acknowledge the risks of bias that are inherent to offering a large group of people blanket anonymity — we make no claim that the findings of our survey represent the entire faculty population.

What we can say, though, is that there are clear concerns — a declining level of trust in administration and fear of retribution for expressing free speech — which were shared by many of the 100-plus faculty members who responded, prompting us to investigate these issues further. A reader of the Free Speech Issue will find multiple stories which were inspired by this survey.

SCRUTINY

Amid lack of surveillance policy, faculty are self-censoring

A classroom recording protocol is currently being finalized

By Dania Al Hadeethi
DEI Coordinator

In spring 2024, the University decided not to renew the contract of former Kenan-Flagler Business School professor Larry Chavis after recording several of his classes without his knowledge.

Lacking a specific policy on classroom surveillance, University administration deferred to North Carolina's one-party consent law as justification for recording Chavis' classes without informing him. In the wake of this controversy, many faculty members expressed confusion regarding the extent of authority University administrators have over surveillance and free speech on campus.

Former Provost Chris Clemens said that after the recording of Chavis' classes, he realized that the University needed oversight, and he began working with UNC's legal team on a new policy during his time as provost.

In October 2025, a UNC Media Relations statement said: "The policy that addresses classroom recording is being revised. It was reviewed by the Faculty Executive Committee and the Faculty Information and Technology Advisory Committee of the Faculty Council." During a Nov. 7 Faculty Council meeting, interim Provost Jim Dean announced that the Office of the Provost had finished reviewing the policy, and that it would be sent to the Policy Review Committee on Nov. 20 for final approval before going into effect.



DTH DESIGN/AUDREY MURRAY

University spokesperson Kevin Best wrote in a Jan. 12 statement to The Daily Tar Heel that the Office of the Provost is currently finalizing a version of the classroom recording policy. The policy, he wrote, incorporates feedback from the Policy Review Committee and the other committees that revised it.

"Once edits are complete, the final version will be submitted to the provost for approval, with the goal of publishing the policy by the end of the month," Best wrote.

Clemens said UNC's legal team drafted a new policy that would draw from the policies of other institutions,

in addition to what UNC had previously done. The draft, he said, took a long time to create before it was reviewed by the different committees.

"The purpose of it was to not allow recording faculty without their knowledge," Clemens said.

The classroom recording policy, according to the November 2025 Policy Review Committee Recap, will set clear rules for when the instructors and students can record, or be recorded, in classrooms. Consent and potential consequences for violations will also be outlined.

Clemens said he hoped the policy would be done before he stepped down as provost.

Previous surveillance concerns

In addition to this past fall, when Asian and Middle Eastern studies professor Dwayne Dixon was placed on administrative leave due to alleged "advocacy of politically motivated violence," there have also been concerns over restrictions on academic freedom in the past.

Michael Palm, president of UNC's chapter of the American Association of University Professors and associate professor in the UNC Department of Communication, said faculty members are aware they may be monitored by the University or even outside groups.

"My sense is that most faculty, at this point, just assume they're being watched," Palm said.

Groups like Accuracy in Media have been known to secretly record University faculty who are not adhering to guidelines regarding speech about diversity, equity and inclusion. Earlier this year, following their recordings, UNC Asheville's dean of students was no longer employed by the university, and UNC Charlotte's Leadership and Community Engagement Office's assistant director was fired from her position.

"I think it is unquestionable that there has been a chilling effect on campus and that many more faculty now than at any other time that I've been a faculty member — and I've been at UNC for 18 years — are self-censoring out of fear for what might happen if the wrong people

disapprove of the content in their classes," Palm said.

An Oct. 3 Faculty Council meeting included a segment discussing questions about Dixon's threat assessment process and the effects of faculty suspensions on classrooms and instructors.

Li-ling Hsiao, chair of UNC's Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, said department heads were not contacted in the process of determining Dixon's threat level, and that the suspension was disruptive to his classes and colleagues.

Harry Watson, a Faculty Council member and former UNC history professor, said that even though Dixon has been reinstated, there are still effects from his suspension.

"It's very hard for anybody's reputation to recover from that kind of charge, and it's also damaging to everybody else that didn't get hit with it, because they go around thinking, 'God, what if that should happen to me?'" Watson said.

In addition to camera surveillance, some faculty have also experienced email and computer searches.

The University Policy on Access to Individual User Accounts states that the University has the right and ability to access and review information stored in individual user accounts on University information technology.

In 2022, UNC released public records documents which showed that the University investigated faculty from the Hussman School of Journalism and Media, including reading faculty members' emails and searching backup systems on their computers without their knowledge. The searches may have included as many as 22 faculty members.

This investigation came after a leaked donor agreement and focused on professors who had been critical of Walter Hussman, the school's namesake.

"I certainly proceed under the assumption that anything that I communicate, whether it's on a UNC-issued computer or through a UNC Zoom account or my UNC email account, that it is subject to surveillance," Palm said.

X: @dailytarheel

WE'RE HIRING!

GET PAID TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

- \$600-\$2,000 SIGN ON BONUS
- \$16.50 WEEKEND PAY
- FREE CERTIFICATIONS

STUDENTS WELCOME INTERESTED IN HELPING OTHERS, MEDICINE, NURSING, PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIAL WORK, OT/PT, & OTHER HUMAN SERVICES FIELDS? SCAN BELOW!



JOBS.RSI-NC.ORG



JOURNALISM

Dealing with censorship in high school newsrooms

K-12 administrators can control what gets published

By Amelia Linton
Staff Writer

In 1983, a group of high school students at Hazelwood East High School in St. Louis, Mo., published articles in their school newspaper that included topics such as teen pregnancy and divorce. The principal proceeded to remove pages from the newspaper without informing the students.

The students, believing this action violated their First Amendment right to freedom of speech, took the case all the way to the Supreme Court. In a 5-3 ruling, the court decided that this action did not violate the students right to free speech, and legally allowed the principal to censor information published in the school newspaper.

North Carolina follows this ruling, and upholds a school administration's right to fully censor content being published in a school newspaper if they have reason to believe it may cause substantial disruption.

"If something about what you publish is going to cause a disruption — a substantial disruption — to the goings-on of the K-12 school environment, then the school has an interest to making sure to put a stop to that," UNC media law adjunct professor Ryan Tuck said. "Particularly if it looks like the school's the one speaking, because that's what it looks like when it's in a school newspaper."

Founded more than 50 years ago, the Student Press Law Center is an



PHOTO COURTESY OF EAST CHAPEL HILL HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK

The ECHO adviser Neal Morgan works with a student on a print edition at East Chapel Hill High School.

organization created in response to the Hazelwood case to try and protect students' rights to freedom of speech. The organization has lobbied for legislation known as New Voices laws, which limit censorship of student newspapers to very specific situations where newspapers' reporting presents either obscenity or clear and present danger. Such legislation has been passed in 18 states across the country, including California, Maryland and West Virginia, among others.

North Carolina does not have any version of a New Voices law.

"There's what the law says and then there's how the law operates, and that's going to ebb and flow, and it's going to vary based on administration," Tuck said.

There are many factors that contribute to the role of censorship in student newspapers, and one of the primary determinants is where funding comes from.

"We're self-funded, and so there are no financial strings attached to

our program. I think that changes the dynamic a little bit," Bryan Christopher, staff adviser for The Pirates' Hook at Durham's Riverside High School, said.

Tuck said that this is largely due to the fact that if a school funds the newspaper, and their logo is printed with it, it is easier to associate newspaper content with the school's beliefs.

"Then the school has a heightened interest to ensure that that content or that work or that product isn't

inconsistent with what they want to put out into the community," he said.

Student reporters and editors typically work to find a balance between publishing important stories without going against their administration.

"You can't write about everything necessarily, but we did have a discussion, especially when starting, like, 'How do we want this newspaper to be framed? How do we want this to represent our school?'" Téa Huang, the founder and editor-in-chief of Research Triangle High School's Green and Grey Gazette, said.

The process of developing stories that the administration will find acceptable can range, and is something student editors have to be constantly aware of, Christopher said.

At East Chapel Hill High School's The ECHO, Editor-in-Chief Mischa Dorn said the paper's student editors and adviser Neal Morgan take class time to think carefully about what the paper is writing and which stories they are thinking about running. Dorn said they pay extra close attention to the front page.

While constant changes are occurring in the legal process and political climate, student-run newspapers remain a valuable source of communication and information, Tuck said.

"Schools are nurseries of democracy," Tuck said. "Schools are educational institutions, and one of those educational priorities is and should be, teaching students how to dissent, teaching students how to disagree, teaching students how to express themselves on controversial topics."

X: @dthcitystate

TECHNOLOGY

N.C. House bill seeks to restrict social media access for minors

Children under 14 will be banned from creating accounts

By James O'Hara
Staff Writer

As the N.C. General Assembly prepares to return to session, the N.C. Senate is expected to pass a bill aiming to limit access to social media for people under the age of 16.

This past May, the N.C. House of Representatives passed the bill, House Bill 301, titled "Social Media Protections for Minors Under 16." If passed by the Senate, H.B. 301 will prevent people under 14 years old from creating social media accounts, and will prevent those under 16 years old from using social media unless they have parental consent, in which case they will be able to use the apps starting at age 14.

H.B. 301 passed the House in a 106-6 vote, but it has not yet been placed on the Senate's calendar.

"If it comes to the floor, it'll pass," Rep. Jeff Zenger (R-Forsyth), who introduced the bill and is one of its primary sponsors, said. "I feel very confident it'll pass, and I would expect the governor to sign it."

This bill follows other national and global social media bans for minors. Texas, Florida and Utah have passed or proposed age restrictions throughout 2024 and 2025.

Zenger said he wanted to propose the bill because social media can be used by predators to target children and may have negative psychological impacts on children. The bill, he

said, can help parents who do not want their children on social media.

Zenger, who has four kids between the ages of 23 and 29, said he did not allow his children to have phones until they received their driver's permits, and shortly after that they were allowed to have social media. He said this made them better off and his children have since thanked him for limiting their access to social media.

The bill puts the responsibility on social media platforms to prevent minors from accessing their sites, mandating them to use anonymous age verification or standard age verification. Users will have to provide proof that they are over 16 years old, but platforms would not be allowed to retain any personal identifying characteristics about its users.

Rep. Maria Cervania (D-Wake), one of the six representatives who voted against the bill, said she supports protecting minors online, but there are a few key issues with the bill in its current form.

She said there are privacy concerns as these platforms may use commercial age verification, which requires input of sensitive information and photos which may be stored indefinitely.

"These are easy targets for hackers," she said. "If information is sold, the breaches could be immense when it comes to the safety of minors, and I don't think this bill comprehensively even looks at that."

Ari Cohn, lead counsel of tech policy for the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, said the bill is unconstitutional.

"It contradicts decades of established First Amendment law



DTH/CONNOR RUESCH

The North Carolina General Assembly building is pictured on Monday.

and, yes, things have changed in society and technology, but the First Amendment is constant," he said.

Cohn said speech on social media is protected under the First Amendment for both children and adults to engage in.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association set a precedent that the government cannot limit minors' First Amendment rights based on parental approval. The Supreme Court ruled that California's attempt to prohibit

the sale of violent video games to minors was unconstitutional because it posed First Amendment violations, and provided a parental veto, which they also deemed unconstitutional.

Across the country, other social media bans are being challenged over their constitutionality.

Utah's social media ban faced an injunction from a federal judge, and the ban in Florida is also facing ongoing legal action from the Computer & Communications Industry Association and

NetChoice regarding possible First Amendment violations.

Cohn said if H.B. 301 is passed, it will share a similar fate, likely to be challenged immediately with almost no chance of surviving in the end.

"If we try to restrict speech every time somebody might possibly get hurt, we all find ourselves not being able to say much of anything," Cohn said.

X: @james_hara55885

Personal Voices

The Daily Tar Heel

SPORTS

Student-athlete speech faces ‘much greater scrutiny’

An exploration of institutional policies in media and athletics

By Caleb Herrera
Assistant University Editor

Sports fans enjoy access to athletes, particularly in moments of victory or high visibility. In college athletics, this access is largely shaped by institutional policy as opposed to national standards.

Unlike professional sports leagues, the NCAA does not have explicit guidelines requiring that athletes speak with the media outside of scheduled championship events. This access is largely structured as press conferences, and interviews are coordinated by respective university staff who oversee direct media communication with athletes.

Dominic Coletti, program officer for the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, said universities vary in how well they balance athlete privacy with media access.

Coletti, whose role includes education and advocacy for journalists, said problems arise when access to athletics is restricted based on a journalist’s status. While he has not seen this occur widely, he emphasized that student journalists need clear guidance on their legal rights and practical strategies for accessing information, especially in situations where a university’s or athletic department’s rules may unintentionally limit reporting.

UNC’s “Communications and Media Relations” policy for student-athletes frames them as highly visible representatives of the University, noting that their actions are “under much greater scrutiny than those of



DTH DESIGN/WREN SILMAN

non student-athletes or even athletes at other universities.” The Athletic Communication Office serves as the primary liaison between student-athletes and media, like coordinating interviews, managing press credentials, organizing press conferences and overseeing athletics messaging.

Under this policy, student-athletes have a responsibility to all parties involved to cooperate with the media when possible. However, this access to athlete information has limitations.

According to the University’s “Policies and Procedures Regarding the Protection of Student-Athletes’ Confidential Information,” any disclosure of a student-athlete’s

confidential information to the media requires explicit written consent from the athlete. In cases where a journalist asks about an injury or personal matter, athletics and medical staff cannot release that information without explicit permission.

The policy also governs how medically related information may be shared. Only authorized personnel — such as head coaches, athletic trainers or designated communications staff — can provide limited updates, like the injured body part or an estimated return timeline. Athletes are also prohibited from sharing other athletes’ private information

publicly and any disclosures must be intentional and authorized.

Livis Freeman, a UNC distinguished associate professor of sports communication in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media, has owned 4ourfans Inc. a public and community relations company for professional athletes, for 24 years. During that time, Freeman has worked directly with high profile professional athletes. He also co-teaches Media and Journalism 377: Sports Communication, where discussions frequently focus on media access, name, image and likeness and athletes managing their own personal brands.

Freeman said he has observed media access to athletes becoming more structured over time, as the rise of various media platforms have “cut out the middleman,” leading to clearer, more explicit guidelines.

Coletti, however, highlighted the need for clear guidance and decision making on all sides to ensure transparency and responsible access. He recalled a 4-year-old incident at the University of Michigan in which then-President Mark Schlissel and other Big Ten conference presidents discussed ways to conduct university business outside of the Freedom of Information Act guidelines. According to reporting by The Washington Post on March 5, 2021, this communication was conducted through “The Big Ten Portal,” in which administrators communicated about returns to campus amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Freeman said he feels it is the University’s responsibility to protect student-athletes, especially in an era where even small missteps can quickly affect public perception. He added that structured access is not intended to limit coverage, but to create an environment where athletes can respond thoughtfully and media can report accurately, which can be achieved through trust and mutual respect on both sides.

“Ultimately, it’s a win-win situation when both sides get it right, and the players and the teams are able to get out the right message, and the young journalists are able to kind of report it the right way,” he said. “So hopefully, things will only get better with the relationships and there’ll be more earned trust.”

X: @calebherrera_

FEDERAL GUIDELINES

Fate of identity-based spaces uncertain across UNC System

BSM’s Upendo Lounge revocation is part of a bigger picture

By Ragan Huntsman
Staff Writer

On July 29, 2025, federal guidelines released by U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi highlighted the potential for “unlawful discrimination” by certain programs, including those labeled as diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. In the memorandum, access to facilities or resources on college campuses based on race or ethnicity was cited as an example of unlawful practice.

At UNC and across the UNC System, students have seen these guidelines manifest through the dissolution of control of identity-based spaces for student organizations, like the Upendo Lounge, which UNC’s Black Student Movement said it formerly co-owned.

According to Bondi’s federal guidance, institutions that receive federal funding must ensure that campus spaces, programs and resources do not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion or other protected characteristics. The guidance states that even initiatives intended to promote diversity may be unlawful if they restrict access to individuals outside these programs.

In an email to The Daily Tar Heel, UNC Media Relations wrote that the University must allow for campus spaces to remain open and accessible to all students in accordance with these requirements.

Elise Ramos, director of diversity, equity and inclusion in the Undergraduate Executive Branch of UNC’s Student Government, said the University has taken a “subjective approach” to state guidelines. Regarding identity-based spaces on campus, she said the dissolution of the Upendo Lounge was “super jarring.”

Ramos noted that other identity-based spaces and organizations on campus could be at risk of dissolution, such as the Carolina Latinx Center. She said that even though UNC is bringing in increasingly large new first-year classes and raising tuition, she feels that the administration no longer believes in putting funding toward certain programs.

“And I think that when that happens, the first things to go are

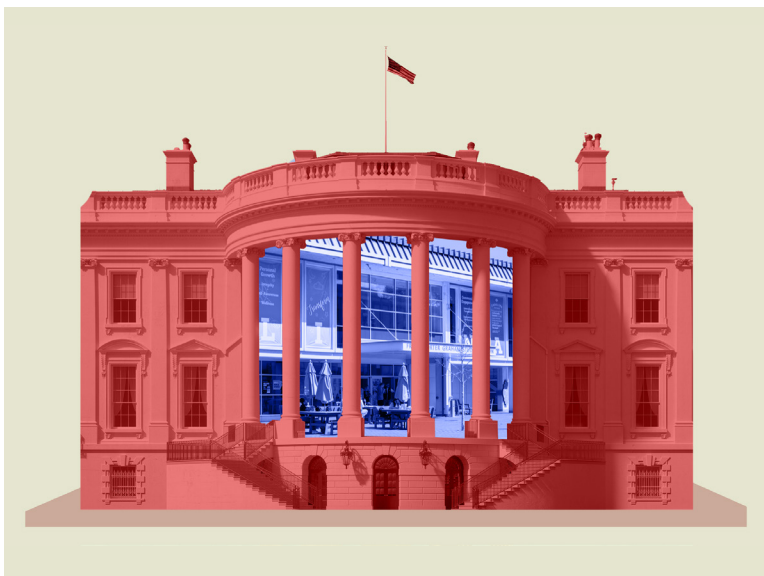
Joys Lutwangu, president of the African Student Union at N.C. State University, said federal guidelines have had a major impact on DEI spaces on campus. Lutwangu said she questions the future of her N.C. State’s ASU, wondering if the organization will need to change its name, or if it will even be able to stay at all.

“When I think of the identity-based spaces, I think about our African Cultural Center,” Lutwangu said. “It’s right in the heart of campus, open to all, but it’s definitely a safe space made for Black students like myself from any ethnic background.”

Lutwangu said the NCSU activities board for Black students was recently defunded and demoted to a regular student organization, meaning they are unable to have campuswide events. She said the Black Male Initiative at NCSU was also impacted through the closure of two residence halls that were rented out for male students of color.

“N.C. State has slowly been removing spaces,” Lutwangu said. “So there’s a concern, and there are a lot of questions that I don’t really know the answer to right now.”

Lutwangu said that with threats to identity-based spaces, there are feelings of defeat among organizations and a decline in



DTH DESIGN/NICK LOTZ

student participation, especially with ASU.

“Is there anything we can do? Because if this is federal policy, is a protest really going to work?” Lutwangu said.

Gared Wong, vice president of the Asian American Students Association at UNC, said the current threat to the organization has been minimal, but he worries about the defunding of the program, as well as the Asian American Center on campus.

While AASA doesn’t have a specific identity-based space on campus, Wong said the organization has had to scale back on events and programming because of funding cuts. To rebound from defunding and other policies that

directly affect its members, Wong said AASA is working with other Asian and Asian American interest organizations to be a united front.

Wong said organizations like AASA are central to learning more about identity and culture, and that investing in them and bringing new perspectives to the table is crucial.

“We are part of what makes Carolina so special and so beautiful,” Wong said. “And if you don’t invest in that, and you drive those students away and those communities away, you really lose the beauty of student life and the holistic approach to university.”

X: @dailytarheel

INTERNATIONAL

Chinese students' speech is under close watch

Many worry about surveillance in United States and China

By Satchel Walton
Senior Writer

and Dania Al Hadeethi
DEI Coordinator

An anonymous Chinese international student at UNC has secretly hung up anti-communist posters around campus and attended a protest at Duke University surveilled by the Chinese embassy. He would like to share his opinions about Chinese governance more widely, but he can't do that because of restrictions by the Chinese government — which are imposed on him even in the United States.

He related his situation to a prison, where inmates live with the possibility of being watched at any moment.

"It's like the panopticon," he said. "They are not necessarily watching you as an individual, but they are watching someone, and you know it might be a threat, and if that happens to me it would be a huge cost."

Three years ago, his posters protested China's restrictive COVID-19 policies and crackdowns on civil society. He was part of an anonymous group chat that distributed anti-Chinese Communist Party fliers that students around the world could print and post around their campuses. He saw similar posters around campus that he didn't put up, so he knows there were others like him. But he doesn't know who they are.

These students have reason to remain discreet. From the United States to Europe to Australia, Chinese university students who criticize their home government have suffered retaliation in what Amnesty International has called a "campaign of transnational repression." Chinese officials harass students' families in China, encourage students to report anti-CCP speech and closely surveil student activism.

Few police departments and universities take significant action to protect students from intimidation. Part of the reason is how financially lucrative international students

are for U.S. universities — most of them pay full tuition, and China is the second-largest country of origin nationally. In 2019, UNC had

1049 Chinese students and 601 faculty and academic staff. While most of them were on short-term exchange programs, both numbers were far larger than those from any other country.

Jonathan Zimmerman, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, said it is a scandal that for some topics and students, Chinese rules on speech effectively apply, even on American soil.

"We don't really have a public discussion of this fact. It's not just like international students are afraid of ICE or masked dudes outside, everyone's talking about that, but nobody's talking about the fact that some of them are actually afraid of the regimes back home and are biting their tongues because they don't know who's listening," Zimmerman said.

In China itself, an authoritarian one-party state, speech about certain topics is heavily restricted. On its internet, most major Western websites are blocked by the "Great Firewall". Banned topics on the



DTH DESIGN/AUBREY WORD

Chinese internet range from those considered moral issues (no detailed writing of sex scenes) to the political (no supporting pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong).

Recently, Chinese international students haven't just been feeling pressure on their speech from their home country. They're now facing additional threats from the Trump administration.

In April 2025, the federal government terminated six UNC-CH international student visas with no explanation. These terminations were a small percentage of the 1,000-plus revocations since that year, including the visas revoked at N.C. State, UNC Charlotte and Duke Universities.

In May 2025, the U.S. Department of State announced they would "aggressively revoke" Chinese student visas and increase scrutiny against F-1 and J-1 visa holders and visa applicants from both mainland China and Hong Kong. The Department of State also announced that it would conduct

thorough and comprehensive social media vetting of all student and exchange visitor applicants.

A UNC junior from China said that there are some issues they would be

hesitant to discuss in China, and others they would be hesitant to discuss in the United States given their visa status. They said that "you cannot talk about certain things" in China, and in the United States they stepped down from an environmental-related event due to fear of the Trump administration's revocations of student visas.

In both countries, they said, their speech "is never 100 percent free."

"I'm not glorifying my home country all the time," they said. "Every country has good and bad things, they're always two-sided."

Dylan Liu, a sophomore from Xinjiang, China, said that one of the major changes for U.S. international students came when the Trump administration announced they would conduct social media searches. He said he has friends who were active on certain issues, such as posting about issues in Palestine and Israel, but after the government threats and the six international student visa revocations at UNC, international students started

speaking out less on social media.

Liu also said that he was asked to give his social media account to China when applying for a visa, and he realized after he came to the United States that the newest changes to social media searches wanted to "censor" international students.

"If you said anything, it's also going to become a potential reason for your visa to be revoked, to send

you back," Liu said. "And it's just — I don't get it, honestly."

Liu started a petition against the policy requiring international students to pay for the UNC System-provided health insurance, which was implemented this year. When he sent the petition to a group chat for Chinese international students, he was met with confusion, which he said is because in China, petitions

are not common and it is rare to ask administration for changes.

He said he thinks the second reason for this confusion is because of the Trump administration's restrictions on free speech and that they're afraid it will cause an issue.

"They don't know if the school is going to protect them," Liu said.

Another student from China said that because Chinese international students are coming from a more restrictive country and are here during a politically turbulent time in the United States, they, by default, "stay on the low."

The student also said they experienced restrictions to their free speech while living in China. They spoke negatively about President Xi Jinping on WeChat, a Chinese social media platform, and shared an article from outside of the firewall critiquing the president.

Afterward, their WeChat account was permanently banned.

The student also said that while they don't feel any active threats from the U.S. government, they feel pressure from other American citizens.

"When I went to either [a] pro-Palestinian rally, or like [a] campus workers' rights rally, I felt that I was judged by people who didn't relate to the causes," they said.

They now go to fewer rallies, and one of the main reasons is because of the federal administration.

"After Trump's inauguration, I became afraid of going to those [rallies] because I knew that I'm not a citizen," they said.

X: @satchelwalton

UNC NIGHT@

\$6.25 SEATS

EVERY THURSDAY, ALL UNC STUDENTS, STAFF, FACULTY & UNC HEALTH**

620 Market St. Chapel Hill

****UNC ID REQUIRED, EXCLUDES SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT & HOLIDAYS**

RELIGION

Pit preachers call UNC a 'hostile place' for spiritual solicitation

Their campus speech is protected, despite student pushback

By Jackson Auchincloss
Senior Writer

Most, if not all, UNC students are familiar with the plethora of religious speakers that frequent campus.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution preserves the freedom of religious practice and expression by protecting them from government censorship. According to the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, public universities, as extensions of the government, are legally obliged to uphold these rights and cannot restrict speakers based on their views. Under these protections, religious speakers seen across campus are operating within their right to share their viewpoints.

Stephen Brock, founder of the organization Weeping Heart Ministries, which promotes religious speaking in various public settings, has spoken at UNC-Chapel Hill and N.C. State University for five years. He said that his time preaching is well spent because he is able to have one-on-one interactions with students and help those struggling with faith.

"Our purpose is to make a difference with the Gospel, and that is our hearts' desire — not just me, but all the preachers with me — that the people may know Christ," Brock said.

Another speaker who frequents campus is Tyler Robertson, who is an evangelist and founder of the Good Talk Campus Outreach ministry, an organization that collaborates with churches and student ministries to "share the good news of Jesus." His method for interacting with students is setting up a table next to the Undergraduate Library and displaying questions on a whiteboard with the goal of eliciting conversations with passersby.

Both speakers said they have faced disagreement and backlash from college students for sharing their views, with Robertson specifically calling UNC "the most hostile place" he's ever been. Despite this, he said this contention can be beneficial for students.

"I don't think, sometimes, students know what they believe until they express it," Robertson said. "So if you don't have the First Amendment, you don't have the freedom of expression, then you don't have the freedom of identity. 'Cause if you can't express yourself, how do you know who you are?"

UNC-CH first-year Hunter Rushing said he interacts with Robertson's ministry when they are on campus to experience perspectives that differ from his own. He added that it makes him think critically about challenges to his own faith, a practice he believes everyone should engage in to become more educated about their beliefs.

Bart Ehrman, a James A. Gray distinguished professor emeritus of religious studies, said that this sort of critical thinking is becoming less prevalent, which he sees as troubling.

"And so I think information and evidence and argument are all really, really important," he said. "I think the problem is that increasingly, students are finding it difficult to know how to evaluate argumentation and how to look deeper for data. There's so much instant knowledge these days that people aren't really being trained to think. And it's a big problem. It's not a problem just for religion. It's a problem for politics and for social agendas."

Marquise Drayton ('19) said the University is in the position



DTH FILE/DUSTON DUONG

Gary Birdsong, a controversial speaker who died last February, holds up his sign as he preaches at Polk Place on March 18, 2019.



DTH FILE/HAYDON BODE

Joseph Toy, a Christian preacher, solicits to UNC students as they walk by in the Pit on Sept. 22.

as a public institution to test the boundaries of free speech with how accessible campus is to outsiders.

"The Pit preachers definitely lean a lot more conservative, and it presented itself with an opportunity for debate and discussion," he said. "A lot of times it ended up turning into shouting matches, which is sad, because I think we can still have civil debates about difference of opinion, ideology, upbringing."

However, Drayton said he finds it interesting that the speech of Gary Birdsong, a longtime controversial "Pit Preacher" who spoke on campus for four decades before his death last February, would still fall under the protection of the First Amendment. He added that he

believes Birdsong was "teaching the Gospel wrong."

Some students, like Deborah Berhane, a student studying abroad from City St. George's, University of London, believe that some forms of speech that are not already restricted, should be.

"I think they technically have the right to be there — it's a public university — but I think when they're sharing very hateful messages there should be some sort of limitation to what they're doing," she said.

While some students may share a similar opinion to Berhane, the University cannot limit hate speech, no matter its content. However, the University may impose viewpoint and content-neutral restrictions on the time,



DTH FILE/AMELIE FAWSON

Stephen Brock, founder of Weeping Heart Ministries, poses for a portrait in the Pit on Oct. 13. Brock has preached at UNC for the last five years.

place and manner of expression, according to UNC's Freedom of Speech and Expression policy. Additionally, the policy states that the University has the authority to refuse or remove any person who interferes with University operations or refuses to comply with applicable laws.

Birdsong was periodically banned from the Pit by UNC Police, but was able to relocate to other areas of campus.

Another student, who preferred to remain anonymous to avoid being targeted for their views, said the speech of campus religious speakers who harass students should be limited.

"I feel like it's helpful to have a respectful conversation or a respectful debate," the student said.

"But when you're kind of trying to market your ideas to somebody, it's not OK."

Both Robertson and Brock admitted that their aim is conversion, but Brock said he's not on campus to force anyone to change their beliefs but, instead, to plant the seed of Christianity.

"You can't force anyone to believe anything," Robertson said. "So our approach is very conversational. That's why it's called 'Good Talk Campus Outreach,' because we want to have a good talk. We want to have a good, respectful conversation, even though we disagree."

Historical Voices

The Daily Tar Heel

UNIVERSITY

Student activism breaks mold of speech constraints

From the Speaker Ban to Silent Sam, protesters insist on the right to speak

By Avery Thatcher
Digital Managing Editor

During the 1960s, UNC became a testing ground for how far students at a public university could go when challenging the boundaries of free speech and political expression. The disputes at UNC mirrored national conflicts over free speech and student activism at public universities during that era. As civil rights and anti-war movements reshaped American politics, UNC became one of many campuses where questions of academic freedom and state authority collided. As the state's flagship public university, UNC operated under close legislative scrutiny. Bound by state oversight yet defined by its mission of "leading change to improve society," UNC occupied a complex position during the '60s. Administrators emphasized order and political neutrality, while many students increasingly argued that education required engagement with contested ideas. Student activism emerged as a recurring force, shaping institutional decisions and campus culture, often pushing the University forward only after sustained pressure from below. Charlotte Fryar, a history and English teacher who earned her doctorate degree in American studies at UNC and wrote her dissertation on racial justice movements at the University, documented this pattern in her research. "The institution is fundamentally conservative — big C and little c conservative — in its ways," Fryar said. "So to the degree that there is any sort of forward movement, it comes from students." Administrators have often emphasized restraint, citing UNC's obligations as a public institution. In October, UNC administration placed professor of Asian and Middle Eastern studies Dwayne Dixon on administrative leave following reports of his alleged affiliation with "Redneck Revolt," an organization that describes itself as an "anti-racist, anti-fascist, community defense formation." University administration cited safety concerns and conducted an investigation that UNC Vice Chancellor for Communications Dean Stoyer said could result in consequences as severe as termination of Dixon's employment. Students, meanwhile, have challenged the idea that neutrality



DTH DESIGN/AUBREY WORD

Photos by Angelina Katsanis, Viyada Soukthavone, Allison Russell and courtesy of UNC Libraries and 1987 Yackety Yack.

was possible, arguing that silence itself amounted to a political stance. Many student attendees acted in this belief at a rally in Dixon's support. Some said that they view the University's actions as a restriction of free speech, while also emphasizing the importance of making their voices heard to those in power. Dixon has since been reinstated. Student reactions to Dixon's administrative leave are reminiscent of those expressed decades prior after the passage of North Carolina's Speaker Ban Law in 1963. The ban prohibited "known members of the Communist Party" from speaking on state-funded campuses, effectively barring a wide range of political figures from addressing students at North Carolina's public universities. Although framed by lawmakers as a safeguard against subversive influence, the law significantly restricted the scope of political and intellectual discourse on campus. Opposition developed quickly at UNC, where students and faculty argued the ban as incompatible with the University's value of progress.

Student organizations were prevented from hosting speakers whose affiliations placed them within the law's definition, even when those speakers were invited for academic or educational purposes. Faculty members also raised concerns that the restrictions interfered with teaching and research. Rather than preventing political influence, critics said, the law imposed a political judgment of its own by determining which viewpoints were permissible in an academic setting. Hugh Stevens was among the students involved in organizing against the law. Now a First Amendment attorney, Stevens said students viewed the restriction not only as censorship, but also as a personal insult. "The students were really pissed because they viewed it as saying 'You're too stupid or too gullible, too malleable to listen to these people,'" he said. The Speaker Ban forced students to confront that assumption directly and define what academic freedom meant in practice. A pivotal moment came on March 9, 1966, when historian Herbert Aptheker, a member of the Communist

Party and a critic of the Vietnam War, delivered a lecture from just outside UNC's official campus boundary. Barred by law from speaking on University property, Aptheker stood across a low stone wall — now marked by a commemorative plaque — as students gathered to listen on the other side. UNC alumnus Randy Myer ('68), who attended the lecture, said the spot was chosen deliberately. "I think they picked that location because it was the closest they could get to having the dean or the chancellor hear them in South Building," he said. Faculty members also raised objections to the Speaker Ban, and legal challenges followed, arguing that it violated constitutional protections. "There was pretty unified opposition [from] everybody, even up to the chancellor," Stevens said. In 1968, a federal court deemed the Speaker Ban unconstitutional, marking a turning point in UNC's history and affirming the campus as a significant site in national debates over academic freedom.

As the United States' involvement in Vietnam sharply escalated in the spring of 1970, protests at UNC expanded beyond legal challenges to express moral opposition to the war. Students organized teach-ins, marches and demonstrations on campus, often gathering at Polk Place. Administrators responded by implementing time, place and manner restrictions on speech, citing safety concerns and the need for institutional continuity — action which has spanned across decades. In the aftermath of the April 2024 "Triangle Gaza Solidarity Encampment," metal barriers were put up in Polk Place — the physical fences operated comparably to how campus border walls physically discouraged resistance to University policy. Taken together, these movements illustrate a recurring pattern in UNC's history: institutional change has been shaped over time by student activism, situated within political and social movements beyond Chapel Hill.

X: @dailytarheel

Shop *Print News, Raise Hell* merchandise now at

STORE.DAILYTARHEEL.COM

LOCAL

Resistance persists in Chapel Hill's historically Black neighborhoods

Residents have fought against injustice across generations

By Daneen Khan

Community Managing Editor

Danita Mason-Hogans' first exposure to activism was not at a protest or sit-in. It was at Parent Teacher Association meetings.

Mason-Hogans was no older than 8 years old, she recalled, but those moments watching her mother drive home from the meetings in frustrated tears, talking about the treatment of Black students like her daughters compared to white classmates — they stuck with her.

At the time, the all-Black Lincoln High School had recently merged with the whites-only Chapel Hill High School, marking a more formal end to academic segregation in Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

Her mother was not the only activist in the family. Mason-Hogans' grandparents were always present at local meetings. Her uncle combated food insecurity while running Chapel Hill's Mason's Motor Court, commonly known as Mason Motel, a staple of the local Black community. Her father, David Mason Jr., was one of the Chapel Hill Nine — he and eight other students from Lincoln High School organized one of the town's earliest sit-ins.

"I've never met a Mason who didn't have an opinion about something," Mason-Hogans said.

Today, Mason-Hogans works as a civil rights historian and education activist. Being surrounded by generations of "movement people," she said, is the reason she pursued that line of work.

Mason-Hogans was born in Northside, a neighborhood located in the west end of Chapel Hill and parts of Carrboro. Historically, Northside — along with other neighborhoods like Pine Knolls and Tin Top — was home for many Black laborers at UNC, most of whom descended from enslaved people who built the University.

"There were different areas in Chapel Hill, but there was one Black community," Mason-Hogans said.

That community was a home for people like Mason-Hogans' ancestors — and a hub for local activism.

Ben Barber, a doctoral candidate in UNC's American studies department, said social reform often comes from the most marginalized places. Even the smallest acts of resistance, he said, lead to creativity and solidarity.

"Change really flows from the bottom up, and I think that often kind of contradicts some of our notion of how political change happens throughout time, especially during times of crisis," he said.

In 1960, the Chapel Hill Nine were indicted for trespassing at Colonial Drug Co., a West Franklin Street drugstore that refused to let Black people dine in. The next day, approximately 100 community members protested in front of the building, as well as other segregated storefronts.

Similar protests continued for years. A Dec. 18, 1963, issue of the Chapel Hill Weekly reports on a sit-in where 32 demonstrators, "most of them student age," were arrested after gathering within Clarence's Bar and Grill on West Franklin Street. A Dec. 26, 1963, issue records 21 more arrests after further sit-ins.

Business-related protests were just one piece of the local desegregation movement. In 1959, 10-year-old Black student Stanley Vickers was denied admission into Carrboro Elementary School. After Vickers and his family won their U.S. district court case in 1961, he



DTH/CONNOR RUESCH

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP hosts its annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day march down Franklin Street on Monday.



JWCR-001.07, IN THE JIM WALLACE COLLECTION, WILSON SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY, UNC-CHAPEL HILL. PHOTO BY JIM WALLACE.

Protesters gather outside of Clarence's Bar & Grill on West Franklin Street, where 32 demonstrators were arrested during a sit-in in the 1960s.

was admitted to Chapel Hill Junior High School.

Although Vickers' case was after Brown v. Board of Education's ruling that school segregation was unconstitutional, change came slowly in the South. It took until 1966's merger of Lincoln High School and Chapel Hill High School for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools to truly integrate, but Mason-Hogans still remembers so many "little acts" of discrimination in her early years at Carrboro Elementary — racist slurs, cruel teachers, even physical violence. But because of her family, she was never afraid to fight back.

Her parents, she said, would go to the school every time they felt there was an injustice toward any Black student. While it was not a traditional protest, every meeting, every callout and every discussion remained a form of activism.

Protest in the Black neighborhoods of Chapel Hill has continued to evolve. In more recent years, the topic of local activism has shifted from fighting segregation toward combating gentrification.

In 1980, a Daily Tar Heel article featured Northside and Pine Knoll residents protesting the redevelopment of 23 pieces of property in the neighborhoods. Similar situations arose in various years, including in 2010 and 2011, when community members vehemently rallied against a 10-story housing complex built by Greenbridge Developments.

Northside resident Delores Bailey remembers how "ugly" that era of the protest was. Greenbridge was — and still is — on the same block where Mason Motel used to be.

"We were protesting as a community like this is one of the last bastions in our African American community," Bailey said.

Bailey is the executive director of EMPOWERment Inc., a nonprofit focused on combating housing insecurity. The broader issue Bailey recognized in the Greenbridge development wasn't about race, she said — it was about decent housing.

"If you fast forward it now to 2025, there's a lot better will between the community and Greenbridge," she said. "But it still has always been that barrier to housing for us, the barrier between Franklin Street and the communities on the other side of Rosemary."

Bailey said EMPOWERment started in Northside but has since expanded across Orange County. That growth, she said, was because the organization had "the mindset of protest."

Through EMPOWERment, Bailey said she fought to create the Northside Neighborhood Conservation District to protect the community from unwanted development. She has also spoken out at town council meetings, taught residents in a mobile home community to protect themselves from development and helped organize an annual march to advocate for low-income families.



JWCR-031.16, IN THE JIM WALLACE COLLECTION, WILSON SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY, UNC-CHAPEL HILL. PHOTO BY JIM WALLACE.

A protester is arrested outside of Colonial Drug Co., a drugstore on West Franklin Street that refused to seat Black people in the 1960s.

Bailey is also a vice president of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP, which held its annual Martin Luther King Day march on Monday. Participants began this year's march at 10 a.m. and progressed down Franklin Street toward First Baptist Church.

Barber said that the way people protest over time evolves because people need to update past strategies for new times. Along with his studies, he works as a field scholar at UNC's Southern Oral History Program, a role he said he became involved in because he sees oral history as a form of empowerment that sustains people through times of crisis.

"I think we're in a, definitely in a backlash moment where we're trying to see a lot of the victories that we won over the years be undone by regressive forces," he said. "So I think you have to learn from the past, but also update it to your own time period."

In the current climate, Bailey said she sees taxes as a major

protest point as low-income residents struggle to afford increases. Greenbridge residents have helped homeowners fill out tax documentations, and Greenbridge's plaza is now named after Charlie Mason.

"That was finally Greenbridge working with the community that it had, I think, really, really damaged," she said.

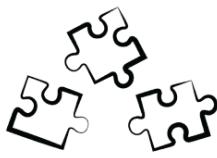
Like Mason-Hogans continuing her family's legacy, Bailey said that even if it can't always be her supporting residents, she will teach another generation of leaders to fight.

"We're human," Bailey said. "We have a right to a lot of these efforts, and as long as we have nonprofits like EMPOWERment which address housing, economic development and community engagement, we will continue to use our voice, continue to teach people to advocate for themselves. And when they can't, we'll do the advocacy."

X: @daneenk_



FUN 'N' GAMES



WE HAVE THE ANSWER.

Solve your job search with new business skills.



Kenan-Flagler Business School

Master of Accounting | Master of Science in Management

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13
14				15								16		
17			18									19		
20								21				22		
23						24	25				26			
27						28				29	30			
	31		32	33					34					
		35						36				37		
			38					39				40		
41	42	43				44					45		46	
47						48				49	50			
51				52	53					54				
55				56				57	58					
59				60								61		
62				63								64		

“A Year in the Life”

This week’s puzzle was created by Will Lassiter, a teaching assistant professor in the Department of Statistics & Operations Research (STOR). He has been a Tar Heel fan since birth and a word puzzle fan since high school.

ACROSS

- 1 Largest U.S. labor union by membership
4 Frowned-upon performance enhancer
11 Rocky peak
14 ____-Clean (detergent brand)
15 Oldest daughter of Martin Luther King Jr.
16 Something that becomes nothing when you add a letter?
17 *Setting for TV’s longest-running animated series
19 Homer’s neighbor in 17-Across
20 South American camelid
21 What all in favor say
22 “Sprechen ____ Deutsch?”
23 Members of the UK Parliament’s upper house
24 Spot that one may crawl or hop to
26 Assistant for Nancy Pelosi or Steve Scalise
27 Uruguayan uncle
28 *WWE event held every August
31 It’s rated using the Fujita scale
34 U.S. grp. for builders, designers, and planners
35 Swanky hotel chain, or a hint to the starts of the starred clues
38 ____ Academy, sports-focused prep school in Bradenton, FL
39 Residents of Rennes, e.g.
41 *Miss a mortgage payment, perhaps
45 Exclamation in Essen
47 Bellicose Olympian
48 ____-friendly
49 Copy, informally
51 Middling grade
52 Haifa’s country (abbr.)
54 Evening meal in Montréal
55 Haul
56 *Alternative to spearmint
59 Hello from São Paulo!
60 Alive
61 Fruity cooler
62 Rival of an Oriole or Blue Jay
63 Tide pool denizen

64 Concorde, e.g.


DOWN

- 1 Margarita specification
2 Take advantage of
3 Make impervious to outside gases
4 Gets the audio and video feeds to agree, with “up”
5 Word chanted repeatedly in “Animal House”
6 Will Ferrell’s Buddy, for one
7 Olympic hurdler Benjamin
8 Feature of a certain “bandit” found in casinos
9 Without purpose or intention
10 Name in a hyphenated South Florida county
11 Common reason for a child to have surgery
12 One of five founding nations of the Iroquois Confederacy
13 Hand in a coupon
18 D.C.-area airport code
24 Amigos
25 Resembling a certain single-celled organism
26 “I’ll take that ____”: response to a non-response
28 Rank above corporal, in slang
29 Calmed, as tensions

- 30 Disturbance in a prison or at a soccer game
32 Muddies
33 Unfeeling
36 Tuscan river
37 Sweet, crunchy legumes
40 Long, rambling pieces of writing
41 Fear ____, popular reality show of the 2000s
42 Anatomical ring
43 Freedom of movement
44 Abdominal injury with inguinal, femoral, and umbilical types
46 Charlotte hooper
49 Federer who won a men’s best 8 Wimbledon singles titles
50 It includes about one-fourth of Rus.
52 “____ Made for Lovin’ You”, 1979 Kiss track
53 Ominous trigonometric function?
54 Mex. Miss
57 Relatives of ©s
58 Consume

Got questions about the crossword?
Send us an email at
crossword@dailytarheel.com

THE SAMURAI OF PUZZLES By The Mephram Group



			7						
5	9							4	8
	4	2		3	9				
		4		9				2	
		5		4		1			
	3			2		7			
			7	8		3	6		
1	2						7	5	
						8			

Horoscopes



Today’s Birthday: January 21, 2026

I’m sorry you have a January birthday. That’s really unfortunate. If it helps, this year will be truly magical. At least one of your dreams will come true, and you’ll make lots of wonderful memories along the way. When the going gets tough, remember the moments that make life special. You’ll be fine.

ARIES, today is a 2 — The forecast says it might snow this weekend, so get excited for icy roads and really cold rain!

TAURUS, today is an 8 — 2016 is back, and you know what that means. It’s time to buy a pair of galaxy print leggings.

GEMINI, today is an 8 — Triple check your Canvas assignments tonight. You’re going to miss one, and you’ll be really unhappy if you don’t find out until morning.

CANCER, today is a 3 — Take your dog for a walk today. Don’t have a dog? Adopt one from your local animal shelter and take it for a walk.

LEO, today is a 4 — Make your Heated Rivalry dreams come true and try out for the hockey team. Is it the right time of year for that?

VIRGO, today is a 1 — That mysterious pool of liquid on your kitchen floor is not water.

LIBRA, today is a 5 — If you don’t know how to parallel park, today is going to be very unpleasant for you.

SCORPIO, today is a 9 — Going to bed at 3:30 in the morning before your 8 a.m. will actually make you feel more rested. Because of science.

SAGITTARIUS, today is a 4 — Is it a conflict of interest for me to write my own horoscope?

CAPRICORN, today is a 5 — Please watch where you’re going in Lenoir. Is that too much to ask?

AQUARIUS, today is a 6 — There are approximately 59 coffee shops on Franklin Street, and every single one of them is out of your favorite drink.

PISCES, today is a 6 — It’s Girl Scout Cookie season. Do with that information what you will.

START THE PRESSES

The Daily Tar Heel

We keep you informed.

Help us keep going.

Donate now at startthepresses.org.

Answers to last week’s sudoku:

9	2	1	7	5	4	6	3	8
8	7	5	3	6	2	4	9	1
3	4	6	8	9	1	7	2	5
6	3	4	9	8	5	2	1	7
1	5	9	2	4	7	8	6	3
7	8	2	1	3	6	5	4	9
4	9	8	6	7	3	1	5	2
5	1	3	4	2	8	9	7	6
2	6	7	5	1	9	3	8	4

Answers to “Podium Finish”

S	T	E	R	N		P	R	O	S		C	D	S		
S	E	X	E	S		A	D	E	L	A		A	I	R	
S	A	I	V	A		P	F	A	A		W	A	R	D	S
	S	T	E		L	A	D	Y	F	I	R	S	T		
D	E	F	R	A	N	C	O				K	E	I	R	
G	U	E	S	S	E	C	O	N	D		A	M	Y		
A	P	E	A	K		S	A	C	A		T	E	E		
		L	I	F	E		K	I	W	I					
A	L	A		N	O	T	I			S	N	O	O	P	
F	E	Z		G	R	A	D	E		F	O	U	R	T	H
L	I	E	U			L	E	A	N	I	N	T	O		
	B	A	S	E	T	H	I	R	D		T	U	O		
S	N	L	A	L	U	M	N	I		K	A	R	M	A	
I	I	I		E	L	O	G	E		M	R	S	A	M	
S	Z	A		M	A	S	S			S	T	E	N	T	

The Daily Tar Heel is now accepting community crossword submissions!

We want all cruciverbalists to submit, regardless of experience level. Scan the QR code for submission guidelines.



COLUMN

A campaign to redefine dissent as terrorism

By Luis F. Fuentes
Editorial Board Member

“Domestic terrorist.” “A very radical person.” “Professional agitator.”

Within hours of Renee Good’s death at the hands of federal agents — an execution witnessed in high definition by millions — the Trump administration began the work of unmaking her character to justify her death.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem didn’t bother waiting for an internal investigation to label Good’s actions on that day “an act of domestic terrorism.” By the time Vice President JD Vance had begun deflecting blame, calling it “a tragedy of her own making,” the state had already made headway in its attempt to distort the murder of a poet, wife and mother into an unfortunate, justifiable casualty of law enforcement.

The American government propagating dehumanizing rhetoric is nothing new. Americans of many

creeds, races and ethnicities have been unjustly subjected to state violence, which is then justified by labels like “terrorists” or “rioters.” In recent memory, Muslims after 9/11 were targeted by the Patriot Act, and Black Lives Matter protests directly resisted police violence against Black Americans.

Trump’s second term, however, is different. He has flooded American streets with masked, politically mandated militia — unaccountable to all and willing to kill unarmed legal observers. Moreover, the administration asks us to believe she was a danger, in spite of footage to the contrary. It leaves many of us to adjust to the new America we find ourselves in: one in which the government is shifting from

a guarantor to a repressor of First Amendment rights.

In “Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present,” author Ruth Ben-Ghiat asserts that authoritarians

use language to redefine dissent as “radical” or “terrorist” to justify the expansion of executive power. Under this context, Trump is following the playbook of an authoritarian; there should be no uncertainty on this point. First, his administration tested how far they could surpass the courts. Then, they began a violent campaign against immigrants and non-citizens. Today, we witness the murder of an American under the guise of lawful enforcement against radicals.

Good’s death signifies an assault to the idea that Americans may speak without fear of violence from the state. Make no mistake: it has emboldened the enforcement apparatus to enact the same treatment that migrants have experienced on all of us. Some ICE agents now appear to be unaccountably threatening

citizens using Good’s death, one snarling at an observer in Minnesota, “Did you not learn from what just happened?” We watch through our screens as another



DTH DESIGN/GRACE DAVIDSON

“Good’s death signifies an assault to the idea that Americans may speak without fear of violence from the state.”

agent aims a gun at a protester, seemingly unprovoked.

What is the goal of conflating protest with violent radicalism? They are manufacturing consent from us to commit violence against us — to imbue the executive with powers of judge, jury and executioner. Today, that executive is manufacturing blind spots through a combination of media distortion and criminalization of political opponents.

Suppose we allow the administration to define the act of observance as an act of domestic terrorism. The First Amendment will not die in the courts or in newsrooms; it will die slowly in a car in Minneapolis, witnessed by millions who were told to look away. The most radical act now is to keep watching.

X: @dthopinion

COLUMN

Free expression at UNC remains strong, yet has a ways to go

By Hannah Pomeranzeva
Columnist

The definition of free speech on college campuses has been stretched so wide that it has lost shape. For some, it’s the prerogative to debate big, controversial ideas; for others, it’s the ability to confide those same ideas to a trusted friend in hopes that no one overhears.

And yet, while the national trend is sprinting toward restricting speech, UNC faces a paradox — although, a hopeful one.

Nationally, signs point to a growing chill. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression released its yearly free speech survey, finding that students are less tolerant of controversial speech, more likely to self-censor and increasingly doubtful their campuses will defend free expression; this is the lowest institutional trust that FIRE has recorded in years.

Compared to the national slide, UNC has built one of the strongest policy frameworks in the country. In the 2026 FIRE rankings, UNC scored 70.6/100 and placed No. 19 out of 257 schools — earning a coveted green-light rating. With commitments like the Chicago Principles and the UNC System’s institutional neutrality requirements, the University is structured — at least on paper — to protect open debate and make room for ideas in all forms.

That’s the paradox. Compared to schools dragged down by repeated speech controversies, UNC seems to be doing remarkably well, but zoom in, and the picture wobbles. FIRE gives UNC a C-minus speech climate grade, placing us in the bottom 50 for comfort expressing ideas and in the bottom 25 for administrative support for free speech. Trust in administrators is uneven, and self-censorship remains alive and well.

During the spring 2024 pro-Palestine protests, hundreds of



DTH DESIGN/MILA HORSLEY

students took part in a prolonged encampment on Polk Place. When campus police and allied law enforcement moved in to clear the site, 36 people were detained — many facing charges like trespassing and resisting arrest. In the altercation, officers used force and pepper spray against the protesters.

And now, the University offers a new lesson in entrenching distrust. UNC has announced it will close six major area studies centers in 2026 — The Center for European Studies, the African Studies Center, the Carolina Asia Center, the Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies, the Institute for the Study of the Americas and the Center for Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies — as part of a \$7 million budget-cutting plan. Students and faculty learned about the decision after it was already underway. These were hubs of language study, research funding and international scholarship that gave UNC global reach. It’s concerning how easily core academic infrastructure could be dismantled with little warning and student input.

What makes UNC distinctive — and gives hope for progress — is our

political diversity. We constantly meet people who don’t vote the same way, think the same way or move through the world with the same assumptions.

We exist in a state with a Republican-controlled General Assembly, a Democratic governor and a penchant for swinging red in presidential elections. The University itself is composed of a largely blue student body and faculty, but led by a conservative Board of Trustees — predictably adding tension.

But maybe such friction is good practice for a university like ours. While many campuses drift toward consensus, UNC students are constantly negotiating where they stand and holding our administrators to account — not always successfully, but actively.

The work can be thankless and it is certainly incomplete, but there’s hope. Every debate, every challenge to our administration’s authority strengthens the foundations of free expression.

X: @dthopinion

COLUMN

We must upvote University enforcement of Yik Yak rules

By Sydney Baker
Opinion Editor

At UNC, Yik Yak can be a glorious place — a mecca of curated college humor, the capitol of Phillips Hall shitposting, a coping mechanism to grieve UNC basketball.

But the qualities that make Yik Yak fun are the same things that make it dangerous. Unlike many other social media platforms, Yik Yak users are within a 5-mile radius of each other, creating what some call “hyperlocal anonymity,” in this “whisper network,” gossip feels intimate and tangible.

We need anonymous speech platforms — for protecting whistleblowers, for preserving the coveted marketplace of ideas free from University tampering.

I’m not suggesting that the University should freely regulate Yik Yak; giving administration the power to regulate a little bit could quickly result in them undermining students’ freedom. But we can demand they mitigate the harmful effects of anonymous speech that unfold inside their jurisdiction.

UNC Media Relations confirmed that the University does view the app, yet it seems administration’s past involvements have been less about student safety and more about University interests. For example, the University tracked one student via a string of Yik Yak posts when his snack business venture violated a University vending machine contract with another company.

But at UNC, there has been far more dangerous activity than a student snack business — Yik Yak too often devolves into a hub for fear mongering, misinformation, doxing and bullying.

During my first year on campus, Yik Yak users, vexed by a satire I wrote for The Daily Tar Heel, aired their cruelties across the platform. My name and screenshots of my

face were everywhere — and there was nothing I could do about it.

On Aug. 28, 2023, when a gunman on campus fatally shot associate professor Zijie Yan, misinformation and disinformation ran rampant on Yik Yak, with posts claiming more than 20 people were dead, or that the gunman was arrested while police were still searching for him.

The app’s slimy underbelly extends to other universities, too. Last November, at the University of Florida, Yik Yak users doxed the name of a female student after brothers of a campus fraternity posted a video of her on X, heavily intoxicated and engaging in sexual acts with multiple men. At Kenyon College, an anonymous user proposed a gang rape at the school’s women center, and at the University of Missouri, a student made threats of violence against Black students.

If users are harming other students behind a Yik Yak pseudonym, University officials should issue subpoenas to track down and punish students using their own code of conduct. They should flag misinformation with urgency, and they should involve law enforcement to investigate violent threats.

Consider the alternative: the University bans it altogether — which UNC System president Peter Hans proposed in 2024 — shoving the app into an underground nabe.

Yik Yak’s mantra, “Find your herd,” underlines it clearly: this is the kind of university accountability we must demand together.

If users knew there were consequences, maybe dangerous posts would decrease. Yakarma is a bitch — what goes around should come around. And that starts with demanding that our University protect its students, whether that be physically on campus or in our digital crevices.

X: @sydneyj_baker

COLUMN

Public media is essential to democracy

By Maggie Mead
Editorial Board Member

In early January, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting — the Department of Education-funded nonprofit that sponsors NPR, PBS and other public radio stations — announced it was shutting down following Congress’ \$1.1 billion funding revocation. Critics of the CPB malign it as biased, old-fashioned state propaganda, a waste of taxpayer money in the age of online streaming services. However, in our era of political, social and economic stratification, public media like the CPB is paramount to protecting the little consensus reality Americans have left.

Detractors of the CPB argue that state-sponsored media violates the First Amendment’s promise of freedom of the press, further polarizing political and social life. How could the media marketplace be free, they ask, when the CPB — and its liberal agenda — receives government subsidies directly from the taxpayer’s pocket? Instead, kill it and “let 1,000 podcasts bloom,” writes Andy Kessler for The Wall Street Journal, urging Americans to unleash their rugged individualism in the free marketplace of Patreon and Substack.

Call me old-fashioned, but I do not want to live in a world where people only get their news, entertainment and ideas from paid membership podcasts. Don’t get me wrong; I consume nonmainstream media. Like most members of my generation, I can barely pass the “Eating Without YouTube” challenge. Fewer barriers to entry into entertainment and news markets



PHOTO COURTESY OF TCS/ROY S. JOHNSON

People protest to keep PBS on the air at an Alabama Educational Television Commission hearing on Nov. 18.

mean that more creative, passionate people are able to cultivate their talents and make media that benefits society.

But independent media organizations face less editorial oversight or fact-checking, and they champion cults of personality. They are also

profit- and engagement-driven, resulting in sensationalized entertainment in lieu of facts. Our culture of individualized and algorithmically-driven content is eroding our trust in our neighbors; “fake news” is a phrase so anodyne that it’s surprising when two parties can even agree

on the reality of an event. Mainstream media outlets don’t seem to hold the answer to the breakdown of consensus reality, either. Dominated by conglomerates so large it would make Kendall Roy of “Succession” jealous, these companies are beholden to their shareholders,

constrained by corporate and political interests. But these old-school media moguls are sunsetting, with audience trust and ratings declining rapidly.

The CPB, with its appropriated funds from the Department of Education, provides a solution to the reactionary tendencies of private media. Its funding yields education research, journalists and fact-checkers and a mission beyond entertainment. Local radio and television stations strengthen civic engagement, increase access to accurate information and cultivate a sense of shared community. PBS Kids isn’t a cure-all to the degradation of our democracy, but its educational content that promotes problem-solving, empathy and critical thinking is definitely better than “Cocomelon.”

Shutting down the CPB shatters our already fragile media ecosystem into a thousand more pieces. NPR will probably survive through private donations, but its role as a public source of information will be fundamentally altered. Without public media, we are barreling toward the Age of Podcasting, a Wild West in which anyone can listen to anyone say anything, whether that be a podcast on Spotify, a Substack think piece or Youtube video essay.

Without the CPB, Americans are further siloed into increasingly individualized obscure understandings of the world around them. Reality is broken down into direct-to-consumer information that requires more discernment — and fewer facts.

X: @dthopinion

EDITORIAL

Public syllabuses are yet another attempt to chill faculty speech

By The Editorial Board

Starting next fall, UNC System professors will be required to make their class syllabuses publicly available. Come August, anyone with a laptop and internet access will be able to view a course’s required textbooks, learning outcomes, grading scales — and the professor’s name. Though this policy change may appear innocuous, it is politically motivated to systematically suppress professors’ free speech. The nominal goal of “increasing transparency” only serves to obscure the UNC System’s true goal of forcing professors to acquiesce to a partisan agenda through public pressure.

UNC System President Peter Hans argues that public university syllabuses should be public records to ameliorate “dangerously low trust” in higher education. It’s true that public attitudes toward universities are poor: tuition costs are rising, post-grad economic opportunities are dwindling and free speech on campus is being imperiled. Something clearly must change to recenter learning as the primary goal of college. But making syllabuses publicly available — thus exposing professors and students to the ire of our polarized, radicalized, violent internet — is not the solution to a transparency problem.

Once syllabuses are made public, right-wing activists will have AI search through the documents. First, they’ll go through highlighting any word, phrase or source that can be coded as left-wing, before stripping it of its context and weaponizing it against professors they disagree with.

There is no shortage of evidence of the University administration’s efforts to curtail faculty speech, while in the same breath insisting that they

are bulwarks of free expression. In the fall of 2025, professor Dwayne Dixon was placed on administrative leave following his alleged affiliation with a left-wing community defense organization — yet in Vice Chancellor for Communications Dean Stoyer’s statement addressing the incident, he insisted that “The University continues to reaffirm its commitment to rigorous debate, respectful engagement and open dialogue in support of free speech.” In February 2025, the UNC System — in compliance with a Trump-issued executive order — mandated the removal of anything related to diversity, equity and inclusion from all general education and major-specific course requirements. As another action taken by a machine systematically dismantling faculty speech, syllabus publicity is a net negative.

Faculty may have to subvert this threat, potentially feeling pressure to change class content — a problematic form of self-censorship. The Editorial Board has spoken to a number of faculty who have expressed outrage and frustration at the prospect of their intellectual property becoming privy to the eyes of the whole world.

Every decision targeting faculty speech begs the question: how many lines of defense remain to protect faculty creativity and autonomy? What’s more, the University has been eerily silent on how it intends to protect its faculty after this UNC system mandate.

As anyone who has ever stepped foot in a college class can attest, the inclusion of something on a syllabus is not necessarily an endorsement by the professor, yet when politically convenient, it will be treated as such. Why? Because the move to publicize syllabuses has not been conducted in good faith. It



DTH DESIGN/CARLY EVANS

is not about transparency or public accountability, but about instilling fear in Carolina faculty.

In the middle of the Trump administration’s war on higher education, the UNC system’s decision must be viewed in a broader context. Groups like The Heritage Foundation — authors of Project 2025 — aim for the political capture of classrooms in America, using public records requests of syllabuses to pressure faculty who teach about subjects like race, sexuality, gender and Israel and Palestine.

Throughout the nation, faculty speech is under attack. Take the

incident of Fox News disparaging a course at UNC due to a student’s blog, or The Oversight Project requesting 74 UNC syllabuses to check for words like “DEI” and “anti-racism.” The current administration and its supporters hope to find justification to frame the university as a corrosive, indoctrination hub.

Neglecting to mention the billions of federal dollars being diverted from research and DEI initiatives, lawsuits over the government’s infringement on academic freedom are well underway. In light of this, the Trump administration has given universities a “carrot or stick” choice: comply

and receive preferential treatment from the federal government, or face funding cuts.

Taken together, these actions codify a new era of classroom surveillance and risks trading the pursuit of academic depth for state-sanctioned curricula. It creates a husk of higher education in which surveilling and broadcasting faculty speech is a prelude to a much greater loss: a generation of students whose education is defined by what is deemed “safe” to teach.

X: @dthopinion

Students, Help Save The Smith Center Keep Dean's Legacy On Campus

500 SMITH CENTER WINS



SIGN UP! JOIN THE TEAM!

Renovate Don't Relocate.

SIGN THE PETITION



RENOVATESMITHCENTER.ORG