



March 17, 2023

Dr. Nuria Cuevas, Vice President  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges  
1866 Southern Lane  
Decatur, GA 30333

Dear Dr. Cuevas,

I write to respond to your February 15, 2023, request for information about the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's compliance with two Standards of SACSCOC's Principles of Accreditation. I appreciate this opportunity to share important facts and key context to explain and clarify the status of our proposed expansion of the curriculum for the Program for Public Discourse, which could potentially become a School of Civic Life and Leadership.

The University is confident the following information will demonstrate full compliance with Standards 4.2.b (Board/administrative distinction) and 10.4 (Academic governance) of SACSCOC's accreditation principles. UNC-Chapel Hill, our Board of Trustees, and my administration have followed all the appropriate governance and academic policies and procedures that are relevant to date as we further explore the expansion of the curriculum or development of the School, consistent with the aspirations and initiatives described in the [University's strategic plan](#), "Carolina Next: Innovation for Public Good."

Your letter cites two news media reports about the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees' unanimous vote to approve a resolution, [posted online](#) and included here as Attachment A, on January 26, 2023, requesting that my administration accelerate its development of the proposed School.

The [resolution](#), as written, complies with the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation, including Standards 4.2.b and 10.4, consistent with the Board of Trustees' advisory role to the Chancellor on academic matters. The resolution was clearly advisory in nature – not a policy decision – and as such was consistent with the Board of Trustees' role as specified by UNC System policy as well as the Board of Trustees' own Bylaws. The resolution notes the administration's authority to identify and develop proposals to meet academic programming needs, acknowledges the necessity to comply with UNC System and UNC-Chapel Hill policy, and "requests" that the administration accelerate the development of the proposed School. My colleagues and I share an interest with the Board of Trustees in considering what could be an important extension of and in alignment with the vision and values of [our IDEAS in Action curriculum](#), which called for an offering that would give students the ability to learn and practice debate and public speaking.

The following sections of our response:

- Identify the University policies that prescribe the roles of the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor, and faculty, as well as govern the development of new academic degree

programs, to confirm the University's compliance with SACSCOC accreditation standards,

- Detail the process the University used to develop and offer a Bachelor of Science Degree in Neuroscience as an example of how we implement our established policies, procedures, and approvals for new academic programs, and
- Provide context about the preliminary nature of the proposed curriculum expansion and my pledge to the campus community that our faculty and academic leaders will decide how to study its feasibility.

## **UNC-Chapel Hill's Compliance with Standard 4.2.b**

Under SACSCOC's Standard 4.2.b, the governing board "ensures a clear and appropriate distinction between the policy-making function of the board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy."

### ***Statutory Administrative Structure***

UNC-Chapel Hill, a constituent University of North Carolina System campus, is subject to the authority of two separate governing boards under North Carolina's General Statutes. The Board of Governors sets policy for the UNC System. (See G.S. 116-3.) Each UNC System campus has a Board of Trustees. (See G.S. 116-31.) The President serves as Chief Executive Officer of the UNC System; the Chancellor leads UNC-Chapel Hill. (See G.S. 116-14; 116-34.)

The Code of the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina and the UNC Policy Manual make a clear distinction between the policy-making function of the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees and the responsibility of the Chancellor and faculty to administer and implement policy. Under Section 400 of The Code, the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees' role is defined as advisory to the UNC System Board of Governors "on matters pertaining to its institution" and to the Chancellor "concerning the management and development of the institution." Similarly, Section 3.01 of the UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees own Bylaws describes the board's role as an "advisor" regarding the Chancellor's responsibility for management and development of the campus. In addition, the UNC System's Code says, the Board of Trustees "shall promote the sound development of its institution within the functions prescribed for it, helping it to serve the people of the state ... and aiding it to perform at a high level of excellence in every area of endeavor."

### ***Roles of the Chancellor and Faculty***

The Chancellor, as described in Section 500 of The Code and state law, serves as the institution's administrative and executive head "who shall exercise complete executive authority therein, subject to the direction of the president ... [and] shall be responsible for carrying out policies of the Board of Governors and the board of trustees."

The Chancellor, subject to policies set by the Board of Governors, President, or Board of Trustees, defines "the scope and authority of faculties, councils, committees and officers of the institution"

and authorizes and approves “all projects, programs and institutional reports,” according to [Section 502D\(1\)](#) of the Code. Other duties include presiding over an elected Faculty Council and ensuring faculty have procedures to share advice about academic policy and institutional governance, with particular emphasis on topics including curriculum matters. Finally, the Chancellor makes recommendations to the UNC System and Board of Governors about the development of educational programs.

The General Faculty's powers are defined in [Section 1-6 of The Faculty Code of University Government](#). These powers include the right “... to discuss and resolve upon matters relating to the life of the University” and “to act upon reports from and to make recommendations to the Faculty Council, faculty committees, colleges, schools, institutes, and other units of the University” and “to request information and reports from and to give advice to the chancellor with respect to any matter affecting the life of the University.”

#### **UNC-Chapel Hill’s Compliance with Standard 10.4**

*Under SACSCOC Standard 10.4, “the institution (a) publishes and implements policies on the authority of faculty in academic and governance matters, (b) demonstrates that educational programs for which academic credit is awarded are approved consistent within institutional policy, and (c) places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. (Academic governance)*

The authority of UNC-Chapel Hill’s faculty in academic and governance matters is described in [Section 1-6 of The Faculty Code of University Government](#), published on the [website of the Office of Faculty Governance](#). It includes the authority “to establish the policies governing the educational activities of, and the award of academic degrees by, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and to promulgate such regulations as are necessary to implement established policies.” The process for developing new academic degree programs described below demonstrates the importance of faculty involvement at each step.

#### ***Policies and Procedures to Create New Academic Degree Programs***

The UNC System’s policy and accompanying Regulation on Academic Program Planning (Sections [400.1](#) and [400.1.1\[R\]](#) of the UNC Policy Manual) detail the process for developing a new academic degree program. The Chancellor may submit a request to create a new degree program for approval by the Board of Governors. A campus Board of Trustees may play an advisory role in the development of new undergraduate degree programs but has no formal role in final approval by the UNC System Board of Governors.

The primary responsibility that UNC-Chapel Hill places on its faculty for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the academic curriculum is shown by the central role that faculty play from the beginning of the program development and approval process. This is consistent with The Code, which says, “In these processes, faculty expertise is essential for sound academic decision making at the campus and system levels” (Section [400.1](#)). That process is collaborative and includes several opportunities for faculty to share input.

As required by UNC System policy and regulation, UNC-Chapel Hill posts information about how to develop a new undergraduate degree program on the website of the College of Arts and Sciences [Office for Undergraduate Curricula](#). These procedures generally follow the steps outlined in UNC System policy and are listed in the [Sample Planning Timeline](#) on the College website.

The first step is a Request for Preliminary Authorization, which includes:

- program faculty developing a proposal that addresses the questions posed in the Request for Preliminary Authorization form,
- seeking review and approval of the request by the department, chair and dean of the School or College of Arts and Sciences,
- submitting the proposal for review by the Program Committee and Administrative Boards of the General College and the College of Arts and Sciences, and
- seeking Provost and Chancellor approval prior to submission to the UNC System Office for review.

If the UNC System Office approves the request, the next step is a Request to Establish, which follows the same review steps and culminates in a vote by the Board of Governors.

Before a new degree program proposal at UNC-Chapel Hill is even submitted to the Provost's Office, it has already been reviewed by faculty at multiple levels -- the proposing academic department, its Chair, and the Dean of the School or College of Arts and Sciences.

Any new academic degree proposal also requires review by the [Office of Undergraduate Curricula](#) and the [Administrative Boards](#) of the General College and the College of Arts and Sciences. These administrative boards were created under the UNC-Chapel Hill Faculty Code ([Article 6-2](#)) and consist of a majority of faculty members in the School that are appointed by the Chancellor upon recommendation of the Dean. The Program Committee of the Administrative Boards includes members of the Boards, a representative from the Academic Advising Program and the Office of the University Registrar, the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Curricula, and an undergraduate student. The committee is chaired by the Curriculum Director and meets monthly to review program proposals, including for new undergraduate degrees, and provide recommendations to the full boards.

### ***Example of Program Development Implementation and Approval Policies and Procedures***

Materials in Attachment B – the Bachelor of Science Degree in Neuroscience – show how UNC-Chapel Hill consistently applies our policies and procedures to develop and approve a new degree program. This documentation includes the following:

- Request for Preliminary Authorization (formerly “Request to Plan”) prepared by faculty in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience and submitted to the Dean,
- Minutes from the Program Committee and Administrative Board of the College of Arts & Sciences review of proposal submitted by the Dean,
- Approval of the Chancellor and submission to the UNC System Office,

- UNC System Office approval of the Preliminary Authorization/Request to Plan,
- Request to Establish prepared by the faculty and submitted to the Dean,
- Minutes from the Program Committee and Administrative Board of the College of Arts & Sciences review of Request to Establish submitted by the Dean,
- Approval of the Chancellor and submission to the UNC System Office, and
- Notification of final approval of the Request to Establish by the UNC System Board of Governors.

Any plans to develop new educational programs or courses – either in conjunction with a proposed School of Civic Life and Leadership or as part of an existing unit – will adhere to institutional and UNC System policies and procedures.

### **Preliminary Nature of Plans**

Leaders in the College of Arts and Sciences are currently preparing the early steps to evaluate a proposed expansion of the curriculum around our successful Program for Public Discourse, including the eventual appointment of a faculty steering committee.

Following our Board of Trustees resolution, I wrote a [message to the University community](#) (See Attachment C) on January 27, 2023, making clear that when this feasibility review process moves forward, we will follow the appropriate steps described earlier in this letter. I wrote:

“Any proposed degree program or school will be developed and led by our faculty, deans, and provost. Our faculty are the marketplace of ideas and they will build the curriculum and determine who will teach it, just as they determined the capacities laid out in our new IDEAs in Action Curriculum. I will be working with our faculty to study the feasibility of such a school and the ways we can most effectively accomplish our goal of promoting democracy in our world today.”

UNC-Chapel Hill will make no decisions about the proposed curriculum expansion (e.g. a potential School of Civic Life and Leadership) without due diligence and proper planning alongside deans and faculty. During that thoughtful and thorough process, we will continue to update the Board of Trustees, as well as our faculty leaders and other interested stakeholders. It is worth noting that, though we are still very much in the beginning of the process, that the work regarding the curriculum expansion for the Program for Public Discourse derives from planning, conversations, discussions with faculty leaders, and site visits dating back to February 2018. This planning included a site visit by senior leaders to the campus of Arizona State University in 2018 to learn about their School of Economic Thought and Leadership, among other objectives.

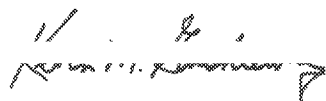
### **Conclusion**

The information and documentation within and accompanying this response demonstrates that UNC-Chapel Hill is following established policies and procedures to explore the potential curriculum expansion of our Program for Public Discourse. The record shows the University’s full

compliance with SACSCOC Standards 4.2.b (Board/administrative distinction) and 10.4 (Academic governance) of SACSCOC's accreditation principles.

Thank you again for this opportunity to respond to your request for information about our adherence to the University's policies and procedures around curriculum development. I'm available to discuss this should you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Kevin M. Guskiewicz  
Chancellor

Attachments:

Attachment A – Resolution of the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Attachment B, Parts 1 and 2 – Program Approval Documentation – B.S. in Neuroscience Degree

Attachment C – Message from the Chancellor: Promoting Democracy and Staying True to Our Commitment

Cc: Dr. Belle S. Wheelan, President, SACSCOC

David Boliek, Chair, UNC-Chapel Hill Board of Trustees

Dr. J. Christopher Clemens, Provost

Dr. Lynn E. Williford, Assistant Provost for Institutional Research and Assessment