

Reclaiming Higher Education for All North Carolinians: A Vision Statement of the NC AAUP

At a time when the basic principles governing higher education throughout the country and in our state are being challenged, we, as professors in North Carolina colleges and universities, feel compelled to reaffirm our core beliefs. We speak not merely as private individuals and members of a profession, but as guardians of the public trust, whose responsibility, whether we teach at public or private institutions, it is to educate our citizens and promote knowledge. We hold the following educational principles to be self-evident and integral to the wellbeing and dignity of all North Carolinians:

Outline of our vision:

- 1. Higher education is a human right that must be available to all NC citizens.*
- 2. State funding for the core academic mission of public higher education must be restored and must prioritize academics.*
- 3. The principle of shared governance is essential to preserving higher education's core mission and values.*
- 4. A diverse range of course offerings and academic programs must be offered at each UNC campus.*
- 5. Research must be a system-wide priority.*
- 6. Faculty must earn a living wage.*
- 7. Academic freedom remains essential to higher education's mission.*

Our vision explained:

1. Higher education is a human right that must be available to all NC citizens.

In *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the United States Supreme Court declared: "Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship."

These words are as true today as they were in 1954. Yet in recent decades, the United States has consistently found its national educational performance to be lacking. Various studies place our higher education system behind that of counterparts in Canada, Singapore, Finland, Japan, and elsewhere. We are deeply concerned that a long-term trend of declining legislative commitment to funding public education, as well as dubious experiments in so-called "educational reform," have left our students less prepared and have deprived them of the skills required for successful careers and active citizenship. Diminishing investment in public education runs counter to the principles stated in *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

We further believe that in North Carolina, the lack of adequate support for public education in recent decades has undermined the state's obligations under article 1, section 15 of the North Carolina Constitution, which states, "The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right."

We welcome the goal articulated by University of North Carolina President Margaret Spellings in her inaugural address: "Higher education is the next frontier—a new civil right." President Spellings' statement recognizes that citizenship, civil rights, and higher education are essential pathways to the reputation and future success of our state. We call on her and other public officials to honor this commitment by providing the resources needed to ensure that every North Carolina citizen can reach this next frontier.

In particular, we call on university leaders and elected state officials to:

- Ensure that all citizens have full access to a college education.
- Make tuition affordable, even free if possible, and place limits on student fees which are currently driving up the total cost to attend North Carolina colleges.
- Support historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), while providing assistance when needed in order to maintain essential academic standards.
- Maintain the quality of teacher education programs in an era of dwindling legislative support for public school teachers

2. State funding for the core academic mission of public higher education must be restored and must prioritize academics.

Article 9, section 9 of the North Carolina Constitution states: "The General Assembly shall provide that the benefits of The University of North Carolina and other public institutions of higher education, as far as practicable, be extended to the people of the State free of expense." With these words, the constitution wisely recognizes the public value of educating citizens and creating knowledge. Funding higher education is an investment in the future and progress of the state with a large net return. It increases incomes and tax bases while simultaneously reducing demand for and the cost of public services such as health care, criminal justice, poverty programs, etc. It is less expensive to educate people than to manage the problems associated with negligence of citizens' education. In the new economy, states that invest in people and knowledge experience greater social and economic progress.

An "Academics First" approach to budgeting ensures that high-quality instruction for students can be guaranteed before allocations are made to enterprises and activities lying clearly beyond our institutions' core missions. To ensure that all North Carolinians receive a high-quality education, priority must be given to fair faculty salaries over bloated administrative bureaucracies, expensive sports programs, and construction projects that do not directly support the university's academic mission.

3. *The principle of shared governance is essential to preserving higher education’s core mission and values.*

We believe that it is in the public interest to adhere to the principle articulated in the AAUP’s “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities,” that the “faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process.” The faculty must be responsible for formulating and overseeing the curriculum if the university is to retain its academic character and generate knowledge for the public good. Disturbing recent trends include the explosion of administrative positions with higher pay than faculty; rapidly escalating pay for chancellors while faculty salaries stagnate; recruitment of administrators with connections to the student debt industry and to for-profit universities; and the rapid increase in secret foundation development budgets and expenses. These trends only marginalize the voices of those who are most experienced with teaching and research.

In particular, we call on university leaders and elected state officials to:

- Endorse and support shared governance at all NC universities so that faculty have an integral role in all decisions impacting the curriculum and teaching.

4. *A diverse range of course offerings and academic programs must be offered at each UNC campus.*

The current UNC system mission statement declares, “The University of North Carolina is a public, multi-campus university dedicated to the service of North Carolina and its people. It encompasses the 17 diverse constituent institutions and other educational, research, and public service organizations. Each shares in the overall mission of the University. That mission is to discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society.” Consistent with this statement, we believe that maintenance of a broad array of academic programs is crucial for preparing today’s students for the complexity, diversity, and change they will face during their lifetimes. Limiting individual campuses to a narrower mission will significantly weaken our institutions’ abilities to “apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society.”

In particular, we call on university leaders and elected state officials to:

- Support and endorse the preparation/education of students for future careers not just the current job market
- Support and endorse the importance of university-level teaching of critical thinking skills so students are better prepared for any career and better prepared as citizens of this state/country.
- Advocate the relevance of higher education as preparation for rich, productive lives, full citizenship, and access to rewarding careers

5. Research must be a system-wide priority.

Research should be a priority for the system as a whole and for each individual campus. The progress of our state and country depends on the discovery and application of new knowledge in all fields, including creative endeavors. This mission is essential for making universities forces of progress. A vibrant campus research culture is crucial for the training of students and the advancement of society.

To strengthen research on the campuses, we call for the restoration of a system-wide position of Vice President for Research. This office should be charged with supporting campus research activities and making them available to the general public.

We also call for the system to provide teaching loads that are compatible with high-quality research and service, in the service of a world-class university system.

6. Faculty must earn a living wage.

Whether or not they are on a track leading to tenure, faculty must receive salaries they can live on. Because tenure create an incentive for individuals to undertake the long and financially risky education required to teach at the college level while also ensuring academic freedom, full-time tenure-track contracts remain the best way to ensure that our citizens have the qualified faculty they deserve. Full-time faculty are the glue that hold colleges and universities together by performing committee service and ensuring mentoring and advising of students.

Public officials and university administrators cannot credibly claim that they support education while continuously resorting to non-tenure track contracts, which frequently offer a non-living wage and place our students' educators in precarious living conditions. In the long term, increasing tenure track appointments is the best way to ensure that North Carolinians received quality education; in the short term, non-tenure track faculty must receive salaries they can live on and a minimum of job security.

In particular, we call on university leaders and elected state officials to:

- Support, reinstate, and expand tenure-track faculty positions, ensuring that it remains the basic standard for academic contracts.
- Standardize contingent/adjunct/clinical faculty positions in terms of salary, job security, and establishment of ranks for advancement.

7. Academic freedom remains essential to higher education's mission.

The American Association of University Professors' historic 1940 statement declares that higher education's mission of educating citizens "depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition." We reaffirm that this goal can only be achieved by preserving and fortifying our traditions of academic freedom in research and teaching. Tenure rights and academic freedom also should not be abridged through excessive post tenure review requirements that discourage open expression by faculty. Universities must defend the right to academic freedom of all faculty, especially non-tenure track faculty, whose numbers are growing and who are financially and professionally the most vulnerable.

We therefore espouse and support the positions on academic freedom developed by the University of Chicago in the Report of the Committee on Free Expression, which declares: "It is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive. Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community."

We call on university leaders and elected state officials to endorse and support academic freedom for faculty and students.

Conclusion

In the spirit of public service and in keeping with our historical role, members of the North Carolina conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) offer this comprehensive vision of higher education in our state in the twenty-first century, including issues of shared governance and academic freedom. This statement has been prepared by the North Carolina conference of the AAUP with input from chapters at colleges and universities across the state. Our conference is strengthened by the diversity of the institutions where our members teach. These include large state universities; independent colleges and universities; large and small, institutions with a religious affiliation; and HBCUs.

Since its foundation in 1915, AAUP has helped to shape American higher education by developing the standards and procedures that maintain quality in education and academic freedom in this country's colleges and universities. The AAUP has always believed that its mission of defending professional standards in higher education is part of the broader task of defending the central role that education plays in a democratic society. At a time when our nation's commitment to higher education seems in question – and in a day when the essential role of higher education in building a democratic society and nurturing cultured citizens seems in doubt -- we, as members of the NC state conference, feel that AAUP's principles and those stated above are more important to affirm than ever.

The North Carolina Conference of the American Association of University Professors