

February 25, 2026

15 minutes after the adjournment of the Committee on Strategic Initiatives

Via Videoconference and PBS North Carolina Livestream

UNC System Office

223 S. West Street, Suite Number

Raleigh, North Carolina

AGENDA

OPEN SESSION

- A-1. Approval of the Open Session Minutes Terry Hutchens
 a. Minutes of January 28, 2026
 b. Minutes of February 16, 2026
- A-2. Academic Affairs Update David English
- A-3. UNC System Academic Degree Program Actions..... David English
- A-4. Civil Discourse Initiatives in the UNC System David English
 Melanie Escue, University of North Carolina Pembroke
 Liz Le Grange, Constructive Dialogue Institute

CLOSED SESSION

- A-5. Approval of the Closed Session Minutes Terry Hutchens
 a. Minutes of January 28, 2026
 b. Minutes of February 16, 2026
- A-6. 2026 Board of Governors Oliver Max Gardner Award Nomination Terry Hutchens

OPEN SESSION

- A-7. Adjourn

Additional Information:

- Comprehensive Transition Postsecondary (CTP) Programs Report

Closed Session Motion

Motion to go into closed session to:

- Prevent the premature disclosure of an honorary award or scholarship.

Pursuant to: G.S. 143-318.11(a)(2).

DRAFT MINUTES

January 28, 2026

15 minutes after the adjournment of the Committee on Strategic Initiatives

Via Videoconference and PBS North Carolina Livestream

UNC System Office

223 S. West Street, Board Room

Raleigh, North Carolina

This meeting of the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs was presided over by Chair Terry Hutchens. The following committee members, constituting a quorum, were also present in person: Gene Davis, Sonja Phillips Nichols, Kathryn Crisp Greeley, Mark Holton, and Javier Limon.

Chancellors participating were Kevin Howell, James Martin, Kimberly van Noort, and

Wade Maki, Faculty Assembly chair, also participated.

Staff members present included David English, Katie O'Connor, Dan Harrison, Shun Robertson, and others from the UNC System Office.

1. Call to Order and Approval of OPEN Session Minutes (Item A-1)

The chair called the meeting to order at 2:18 p.m. on Wednesday, January 28, 2026. The open session minutes from the November 19, 2025 meeting was approved by unanimous consent.

2. Academic Affairs Update (Item A-2)

Dr. David English provided an update to the committee of recent activities involving the Academic Affairs Department.

3. Faculty Report - Faculty Workload and Post Tenure Review (Item A-3)

Mr. Dan Harrison provided the faculty report which included the Faculty Workload Report and the Post Tenure Annual Report.

4. N.C. Teaching Fellows Program Annual report. (Item A-4)

Dr. Bennett Jones presented the N.C. Teaching Fellows Program Annual Report.

5. Winston- Salem State University Mission Statement (Item A-5)

Dr. David English presented the proposed revisions to the Winston-Salem State University Mission Statement. Chair Hutchens called for a motion to approve the revisions to the Mission Statement for Winston-Salem State University, as discussed, and to submit them to the Board for approval through the consent agenda.

MOTION: Resolved, that the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs approve the revisions to the Mission Statement for Winston-Salem State University, as discussed, and to submit them to the Board for approval through the consent agenda.

Motion: Gene Davis
Motion carried

6. Closed Session

MOTION: Resolved, that the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs move into closed session to discuss the Holshouser award nominations pursuant to Chapter 143-318.11(a)(2) of the North Carolina General Statutes.

The Meeting moved into Closed Session at 3:25 p.m.
(The complete minutes of the closed session are recorded separately.)

The Meeting Resumed in Open Session at 3:30 p.m.

There being no further business and without objection, the meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Sonja Phillips Nichols, Secretary

DRAFT MINUTES

February 16, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Via Videoconference and PBS North Carolina Livestream

This meeting of the Subcommittee for the O. Max Gardner Award was presided over by Chair Terry Hutchens. The following committee members, constituting a quorum, were also present via videoconference: Mark Holten and Sonja Nichols. No Chancellors participated.

Staff members present included David English, Brad Trahan, and others from the UNC System Office.

1. Call to Order (Item A-1)

The chair called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. on Monday, February 16, 2026.

2. Closed Session (A-2)

MOTION: Resolved, that the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs move into closed session to discuss the nominations for the O. Max Gardner Award pursuant to Chapter 143-318.11(a)(2) of the North Carolina General Statutes.

Motion: Sonja Nichols

Motion carried

THE MEETING MOVED INTO CLOSED SESSION AT 2:03 p.m.
(The complete minutes of the closed session are recorded separately.)

THE MEETING RESUMED IN OPEN SESSION AT 2:37 p.m.

3. Adjourn (Item A-3)

There being no further business and without objection, the meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.

Sonja Nichols, Secretary

AGENDA ITEM

A-2. Academic Affairs Update..... David English

Situation: The committee will hear an update on recent activities involving academic affairs.**Background:** The Division of Academic Affairs advances the University's core academic mission. Academic Affairs supports students and faculty as they engage in teaching, research, and outreach. This division evaluates curricular options to ensure they are both rigorous and strategically distributed to avoid unnecessary duplication across constituent institutions. More generally, Academic Affairs designs and coordinates statewide initiatives to improve student retention and success.**Assessment:** Information will be provided to the committee on recent updates in academic affairs at the UNC System Office and across the 17 institutions.**Action:** This item is for information only.

AGENDA ITEM

A-3. UNC System Academic Degree Program Actions David English

Situation: Section 400.1.1[R] of the UNC Policy Manual, *Regulation for Academic Program Planning and Evaluation*, defines the academic program actions that require approval from the University of North Carolina Board of Governors and those actions that are delegated to staff at the University of North Carolina System Office. This report presents those program actions that require Board approval.

Program Establishments

University of North Carolina Greensboro
Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MSOT) CIP 51.2306

Western Carolina University
Master of Science (MS) in Engineering CIP 14.0101

Program Discontinuations and Consolidations

Western Carolina University
Master (M) of Innovation Leadership and Entrepreneurship CIP 52.1499

Background: Per Section 400.1 of the UNC Policy Manual, *Policy on Academic Program Planning*, the constituent institutions and the UNC System Office review academic degree program offerings and bring periodic requests for program establishment, discontinuation, and consolidation recommendations to the Board. Items such as change of delivery mode, change of program title or Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes, change of off-site locations, and change of specialty codes are delegated to UNC System Office staff.

Assessment: Approval of the requested program actions is recommended.

Action: This item requires a vote by the committee, with a vote by the full Board of Governors through the consent agenda.

**Request for Authorization to Establish
Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MSOT)
CIP 51.2306
University of North Carolina at Greensboro**

I. Program Highlights

- The University of North Carolina at Greensboro proposes the establishment of a Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MSOT).
- The purpose of the MSOT program is to prepare students to become licensed occupational therapists who help individuals of all ages participate in meaningful activities (or “occupations”) despite physical, cognitive, or emotional challenges. We anticipate the enrollment to total 50 across the two-year program by year five (25 students/cohort).
- UNC Greensboro’s MSOT program stands out for its strong job outlook—occupational therapy jobs are expected to grow 11percent from 2023 to 2033. This high demand means graduates are likely to find jobs quickly and enjoy long-term career stability. UNCG also offers one of the most affordable MSOT programs in the state, costing less than three out of five peer institutions. As a minority-serving institution, UNCG plays a key role in expanding access to the profession, aligning with national efforts to increase diversity in occupational therapy.
- UNCG’s new MSOT program directly supports the university’s strategic goal to prepare workforce-ready graduates from all backgrounds. It equips students with the skills needed for a fast-growing healthcare field and strengthens the School of Health and Human Sciences’ mission to train essential health professionals. The program also complements existing health sciences programs and will help attract undergraduates interested in occupational therapy.
- Occupational therapy is a high-demand, fast-growing field in North Carolina and nationwide. Jobs are projected to grow 11 percent from 2023 to 2033, nearly triple the average for all occupations. That’s about 9,800 job openings per year, many due to retirements or career changes. In North Carolina alone, there are roughly two job postings for every hire, showing strong employer demand.

II. Academic Program Planning Criteria (UNC Policy 400.1)

1. **Relation to Campus Distinctiveness and Mission.** UNCG’s new MSOT program supports its mission to transform lives and meet regional workforce needs. It prepares students for in-demand healthcare roles, with most graduates finding jobs within 30–45 days of certification. The program strengthens existing health sciences offerings, attracts future students, and contributes to North Carolina’s economy. It also aligns with UNC System priorities by promoting mental health, community engagement, and diversity. As an affordable, high-impact degree, the MSOT program reflects UNCG’s commitment to access, student success, and social mobility.
2. **Student Demand.** Systemwide data shows that application and acceptance rates are stable and programs are attracting sufficient applicants to fill their cohorts. UNCG’s currently has 221 pre-OT students, 132 of which are maintaining a GPA of 3.0 or above, indicating a healthy pipeline of qualified applicants.

Table 1. Other UNC System Enrolled for CIP 51.2306— [Occupational Therapy], [Master’s]

| Institution | AY2019-20 | AY2020-21 | AY2021-22 | AY2022-23 | AY2023-24 | AY2024-25 |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| ASU | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 24 |
| ECU | 74 | 79 | 77 | 71 | 72 | 68 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| UNC-CH | 49 | 49 | 45 | 44 | 48 | 47 |
| UNC P | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | 21 |
| WSSU | 134 | 84 | 84 | 84 | 82 | 82 |

Table 2. Other UNC System Completions for CIP 51.2306— [Occupational Therapy], [Master’s]

| Institution | AY2019-20 | AY2020-21 | AY2021-22 | AY2022-23 | AY2023-24 | AY2024-25 |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| ASU | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| ECU | 21 | 27 | 25 | 25 | 23 | N/A |
| UNC-CH | 22 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 20 | N/A |
| UNC P | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| WSSU | 28 | 29 | 27 | 29 | 27 | N/A |

Table 3. IPEDS Peer Institutions Completions for CIP 51.2306— [Occupational Therapy], [Master’s]

| Institution | AY2019-20 | AY2020-21 | AY2021-22 | AY2022-23 |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Several peer institutions have doctorate occupational therapy programs, but none have MSOT programs because most institutions decided to move to the doctoral level.

- 3. Employment Opportunities for Graduates.** Occupational therapy is a top-rated, fast-growing field in North Carolina. The profession is projected to grow 1.8 percent annually, adding over 660 jobs by 2032, with a median salary of \$94,580. It holds a five-star rating from NC Commerce, reflecting strong long-term demand and job stability.

Table 4. Estimated Employment in North Carolina for Standard Occupational Classification Codes (SOC) Cross-walked to CIP Code: 51.2306— Occupational Therapy, Master’s

| Education Level Requirement | Count of SOC Codes | 2022 | 2032 Estimate | Net Change | Percent Change |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-------|---------------|------------|----------------|
| Master’s | 1 | 3,365 | 4,028 | 663 | 1.8% |

Table 5. Median Wage for SOC Codes Cross-walked to CIP Code: 51.2306— Occupational Therapy

| Educational Level Requirement | SOC Count | Median Wage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Some College or Associate Degree | N/A | N/A |
| Bachelor's Degree | N/A | N/A |
| Doctoral or Professional Degree | 1 | \$94,580 |

- 4. Impact on Access and Affordability.** As part of the UNC System, UNCG offers one of the most affordable tuition rates in the country, helping transform the lives of low-income, first-generation, rural, and underrepresented students. Occupational therapy is a fast-growing field, with projected job growth of 11 percent from 2023 to 2033. Median salaries range from \$83,560 to \$96,370. Based on these figures, in-state graduates can expect a return on investment within one year, with ROI estimates between 68 percent and 73 percent.
- 5. Program Specific Fees or Tuition.** UNCG is requesting program-specific fees or tuition differential for this program.

Table 6. Full-Time Academic Year 2025-26 Master’s Degree Level Tuition and Fees per Year (In Dollars)

| Category | Resident | Non-Resident |
|---|----------|--------------|
| Tuition | \$14,154 | \$53,736 |
| Tuition Differential | \$4,000 | \$4,000 |
| Mandatory Fees (Athletics, Student Activities, Health Services, Educational & Technology, Campus Security, Debt Service, ASG) | \$7,318 | \$7,318 |
| Special Fees | \$1,000 | \$1,000 |

6. **Expected Quality.** UNCG’s proposed MSOT program will be accredited by the Accreditation Council of Occupational Therapy Education, making graduates eligible to take the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) certification exam and apply for licensure in North Carolina and all other states. The program will be a high-quality, mission-driven initiative that aligns with university and UNC System goals. Housed in a modern facility, it will serve as a cornerstone for rehabilitation sciences at UNCG. The two-year, 68-credit program runs continuously across fall, spring, and summer terms.

| DEGREE PROGRESSION (CREDIT HOURS) | FALL | SPRING | SUMMER | TOTAL |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------|--------|-------|
| YEAR 1 | 16 | 14 | 6 | 36 |
| YEAR 2 | 14 | 12 | 6 | 32 |
| Total | | | | 68 |

7. **Faculty Quality and Number.** The proposed MSOT program meets accreditation standards by requiring that all faculty hold at least a master’s degree, with over half holding doctorates. The Program Director must have a doctorate, clinical and academic experience, and an active research agenda. An Academic Fieldwork Coordinator will be hired to meet accreditation standards. Then, two faculty will be hired before year three, with one added in year four and five. All must be licensed occupational therapists with relevant clinical experience.
8. **Relevant Lower-level and Cognate Programs.** Applicants must have a bachelor’s degree before entering the MSOT program. UNCG offers strong undergraduate programs—especially in health-related fields—that prepare students to be competitive for admission.
9. **Availability of Campus Resources (Library, Facilities, etc.).** UNCG Libraries are fully equipped to support the MSOT program with no need for added resources or staff. A dedicated librarian will provide research support, and existing materials already cover occupational therapy topics. The program will be housed in the newly renovated Moore Building. The project is a comprehensive, transformational renovation funded and designed for interdisciplinary collaboration in health sciences. Current IT and academic tech staff are sufficient, and no new hires are planned.
10. **Existing Programs (Number, Location, Mode of Delivery).** The total overall ratio of applicants to accepted students in existing programs for 2023-24 is 3.93 and for 2024-2025 is 3.64.

Table 7. Other UNC System Applied/Admitted /Enrolled for CIP 51.2306— Occupational Therapy

| Institution | Degree Level | Counts | AY 2023-2024 | AY 2024-2025 |
|-------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| ASU | Master’s | Applied/Admitted/Enrolled | N/A | 89/32/24 |
| ECU | Master’s | Applied/Admitted/Enrolled | 108/33/28 | 104/41/27 |
| UNC-CH | Master’s | Applied/Admitted/Enrolled | 196/40/23 | 186/28/24 |
| UNC P | Master’s | Applied/Admitted/Enrolled | N/A | 45/32/21 |
| WSSU | Master’s | Applied/Admitted/Enrolled | 109/32/28 | 165/29/29 |

11. **Potential for Unnecessary Duplication.** UNCG has a strong pipeline of pre-occupational therapy students, with 221 currently enrolled and 132 maintaining GPAs above 3.0. Unlike many new programs, UNCG is well-positioned to meet student demand and launch successfully. System-wide data shows stable application trends, and new programs have not reduced enrollment at other campuses. The MSOT program will build on UNCG's academic strengths to meet workforce needs while supporting access, affordability, and student success.
12. **Feasibility of Collaborative Program.** As a campus-based program, we do not anticipate direct collaboration with other programs given the geographical distance.

III. **Summary of Review Processes**

1. **Institution Review Process and Feedback.** The MSOT proposal followed UNCG's curriculum review process, which begins with the faculty approval, the school or college curriculum committee approval, and the university-wide curriculum committee approval. In the case of graduate programs, the Graduate Council also reviews and votes on the program. The Office of Assessment, Accreditation, and Academic Program Planning reviews the proposal for compliance with accreditation standards. Financial Worksheets are reviewed by the chief financial officer.
2. **UNC System Office Review Process and Feedback.** Throughout the review process, Western Carolina University provided relevant information pertaining to program requirements and resources. The institution submitted appropriate documentation and research to support the statements made.

IV. **Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the UNC Board of Governors approves the University of North Carolina at Greensboro request to establish the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MSOT) (CIP 51.2306) effective fall 2026.

**Request for Authorization to Establish
Master of Science (MS) in Engineering
CIP 14.0101
Western Carolina University**

I. Program Highlights

- Western Carolina University proposes the establishment of a Master of Science (MS) in Engineering in the College of Engineering.
- The proposed program provides opportunities for engineering students to attain increased technical depth and research skills that will support accelerated career advancement and preparation for graduate study. All courses will be offered in person at WCU's Cullowhee location. Projected enrollment in year five is 38 students.
- The proposed MS in Engineering will help fill the need for engineering and research expertise in western North Carolina and across the state. It will offer the flexibility to pursue discipline-specific (electrical, mechanical, civil, and industrial engineering) and generalist engineering coursework and includes an Accelerated Bachelor's to Master's (ABM). The ABM option enables undergraduate students to take graduate-level coursework in their final year and earn both bachelor's and master's degrees in five years.
- The proposed degree program aligns with WCU's mission and the UNC System mission by promoting engaged learning and fostering regional economic prosperity and community development through academic excellence and innovation.
- Graduates will work in industries employing electrical (general, computer, power, and energy), mechanical (general, robotics, and automation), civil, or industrial engineers. Data show significant employment deficits in the surrounding region and across the state over the coming decade. Graduates will also be prepared to pursue doctoral study.

II. Academic Program Planning Criteria (UNC Policy 400.1)

1. **Relation to Campus Distinctiveness and Mission.** WCU offers the only engineering program in the western region of North Carolina. The proposed MS Engineering program will support WCU's mission to provide academic excellence, affordability, and access. It aims to foster the creation and application of knowledge to cultivate economic prosperity, community development, and engagement with technology-oriented industrial employers and entrepreneurs. The proposed program will also support the mission and strategic goals of the UNC System. Students' access to NC Promise tuition rates in the first year of the graduate-level coursework creates affordability, and the ABM option allows for completion of two degrees within a five-year timeline.
2. **Student Demand.** WCU's undergraduate programs in engineering and technology grew 22 percent since fall 2022 (Catalytics), with the trend continuing upward. The department anticipates that current undergraduate students seeking further academic development and marketability through advanced engineering coursework will be the largest source of students for the MS Engineering program. In spring 2025, 331 WCU undergraduate engineering students were surveyed about their interest in earning the MS Engineering degree. Of 92 respondents,

82 percent said they were likely or extremely likely to consider the program for future study. Respondents cited the potential for a higher starting salary, accelerated career advancement, an expedited pathway (via ABM), and preparation for doctoral study among their reasons to consider enrollment. These findings, along with the high industry demand for engineers with advanced degrees, support projected student demand.

Table 1. Other UNC System Enrolled for CIP 14.0101 — [Engineering, General], [Master’s]

| Institution | AY2019-20 | AY2020-21 | AY2021-22 | AY2022-23 | AY2023-24 | AY2024-25 |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| NC State | 46 | 42 | 36 | 42 | 38 | 41 |
| UNC Charlotte | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 6 |

Table 2. Other UNC System Completions for CIP 14.0101 — [Engineering, General], [Master’s]

| Institution | AY2019-20 | AY2020-21 | AY2021-22 | AY2022-23 | AY2023-24 | AY2024-25 |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| NC State | 16 | 12 | 12 | 13 | 11 | 7 |
| UNC Charlotte | 5 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 1 |

Table 3. IPEDS Peer Institutions Completions for CIP 14.0101 — [Engineering, General], [Master’s]

| Institution | AY2019-20 | AY2020-21 | AY2021-22 | AY2022-23 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| University of Colorado, Colorado Springs | 26 | 34 | 35 | 28 |
| Youngstown State University | 1 | 7 | 2 | 3 |
| University of Tennessee, Chattanooga | 22 | 21 | 16 | 16 |

- 3. Employment Opportunities for Graduates.** Graduates will find opportunities in industries employing electrical, mechanical, civil, or industrial engineers. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, these are the most in-demand disciplines of engineering in the state and nearby metropolitan areas including Atlanta, Columbia, Charlotte, and Knoxville. The associated employment sectors have projected annualized deficits of 544 positions over the next decade. Salaries range from \$102,900 to \$138,100 at five years from graduation (US BLS/JobsEQ). A recent Indeed.com survey of positions requiring or preferring an “Engineering Master’s”, identified 75 open positions within 25 miles of nearby Asheville.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (via JobsEQ) data show that approximately 30 percent of engineers across sectors hold postgraduate degrees. A comparison of 2022 data with estimated growth by 2032, outlined in Table 4, shows the estimated market demand for graduates with a master’s degree or higher will be approximately 8,900 or six percent based on projected net change.

Table 4. Estimated Employment in North Carolina for Standard Occupational Classification Codes (SOC) Cross-walked to CIP Code: 14.0101 with a Matching Education Level Requirement

| Education Level Requirement | Count of SOC Codes | 2022 | 2032 Estimate | Net Change | Percent Change |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------|---------------|------------|----------------|
| Bachelor's | 19 | 139,143 | 168,829 | 29,686 | 21% |

Table 5. Median Wage for SOC Codes Cross-walked to CIP Code: 14.0101, Engineering, General

| Educational Level Requirement | SOC Count | Median Wage |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Some College or Associate Degree | 0 | N/A |
| Bachelor's Degree | 19 | \$107,360 |
| Doctoral or Professional Degree | N/A | N/A |

- Impact on Access and Affordability.** Courses in the proposed MS Engineering program will be in-person on WCU's campus in Cullowhee. This delivery mode will offer high accessibility to ABM students who are expected to constitute the majority of enrollment. Students entering as undergraduates with the ABM option can take advantage of NC Promise tuition rates in their final undergraduate year while undertaking graduate-level courses. The ABM format would also reduce the time to earn the MS degree, increasing affordability. Data from NC Tower show that UNC System institution graduates in the 14.0101 CIP with a master's-level degree earned an average annual wage of \$114,050 at five years after graduation.
- Program Specific Fees or Tuition.** Western Carolina University is requesting a \$500 annual tuition differential for graduate students in the program.

Table 6. Full-Time Master's Tuition and Fees per Year (In Dollars)

| Category | Resident | Nonresident |
|---|----------|-------------|
| Tuition | \$4,568 | \$15,287 |
| Tuition Differential | \$500 | \$500 |
| Mandatory Fees (Athletics, Student Activities, Health Services, Educational & Technology, Campus Security, Debt Service, ASG) | \$3,199 | \$3,199 |
| Special Fees | N/A | N/A |

- Expected Quality.** All WCU's existing undergraduate engineering and technology programs are accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) or will apply for initial accreditation in the 2026 cycle. All programs undergo periodic external review and continuous improvement reporting to assess student learning outcomes. The program will require 30 credit hours including 18-24 hours of coursework in engineering and six hours in a support area (business, mathematics, etc.). For students pursuing the thesis option, six hours of thesis research is substituted for engineering coursework. Non-thesis option students will take six hours in engineering coursework or pursue directed projects.

7. **Faculty Quality and Number.** Faculty teaching in the program will hold graduate faculty status at WCU. All faculty will hold a terminal degree and be active scholars in their fields with ongoing research obligations. Most faculty also have engineering experience in US industry. The College of Engineering currently employs 31 faculty members, and that number continues to increase to support ongoing growth of undergraduate programs. The current number of faculty in support area courses (business, mathematics, etc.) are expected to be adequate to absorb the projected MS Engineering student enrollment in existing course offerings. The MS Engineering program would also have a program director who is responsible for recruiting, course scheduling and staffing, program assessment, and management of any graduate assistant duties.
8. **Relevant Lower-level and Cognate Programs.** WCU currently offers undergraduate programs in electrical, mechanical, civil, and industrial engineering. These programs will serve as a source of enrollment for the MS Engineering program, particularly via the ABM pathway. Further, upper-level undergraduate courses will be augmented and cross-listed as first-year graduate courses with the addition of advanced work to support ABM students. In this way, faculty may cultivate students who may be interested and well suited to work in their area of research.
9. **Availability of Campus Resources (Library, Facilities, etc.).** The MS Engineering program will be housed in the Belk and Center for Applied Technologies (CAT) buildings at WCU. Their capacity is adequate to support the program through its startup phase. Equipment needs would also be well met by current assets. Expansion funds have been appropriated by the state of North Carolina in the amount of \$95.3 million to support construction of a new engineering building. This additional space would support the program in years five through ten. Also, current library resources are sufficient to support the instructional and research needs of the program.
10. **Existing Programs (Number, Location, Mode of Delivery).**

Table 7. Other UNC System Applied/Admitted /Enrolled for CIP 14.0101 — Engineering, General

| Institution | Degree Level | Counts | AY22-23 | AY23-24 |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------|---------|---------|
| NC State University | ME (online) | Applied | 14 | 10 |
| | | Admitted | 9 | 8 |
| | | Enrolled | 8 | 5 |
| UNC Charlotte | MSE (on campus) | Applied | 2 | 6 |
| | ME (off campus) | Admitted | 1 | 3 |
| | | Enrolled | 1 | 3 |

11. **Potential for Unnecessary Duplication.** The proposed program differs from those listed in Table 7 in its target audience, delivery modality, and geography. Programs at NC State and UNC Charlotte cater to working professionals and are limited to coursework only. The proposed MS Engineering program at WCU fills a regional need for graduate study in an underserved area of the state, providing an in-person learning experience and a thesis option for students to build research skills.
12. **Feasibility of Collaborative Program.** Opportunities to collaborate with other institutions may result from transfer coursework from NC State’s ME program.

III. Summary of Review Processes

1. **Institution Review Process and Feedback.** This proposal has undergone review and approval where applicable by WCU's College of Engineering Graduate Committee, associate dean, dean, associate provost for academic affairs, Graduate Council, University Curriculum Committee, Provost's Council, chief financial officer, and chancellor. Approval and support were provided at all levels. A prospectus for SACSCOC approval has been submitted, and WCU's Faculty Senate will provide final review in the spring 2026 semester.
2. **UNC System Office Review Process and Feedback.** Throughout the review process, Western Carolina University provided relevant information pertaining to program requirements and resources. The institution submitted appropriate documentation and research to support the statements made.

IV. Recommendation

Staff recommends that the UNC Board of Governors approve the Western Carolina University request to establish the Master of Science (MS) in Engineering (CIP 14.0101) effective fall 2026.

**Request for Authorization to Discontinue and/or Consolidate
Academic Degree Programs**

**Western Carolina University — Master of Innovation Leadership and Entrepreneurship (M)
(CIP 52.1499)**

Overview: The Master of Innovation Leadership and Entrepreneurship (52.1499) at Western Carolina University will be discontinued effective spring 2026. This request to discontinue a degree program has been reviewed by the appropriate institutional committees and approved by the appropriate academic authority(ies).

The request to discontinue the Master of Innovation Leadership and Entrepreneurship is due to low student enrollment. No faculty or staff members will be affected by the discontinuation of the program. Faculty will continue teaching courses that support undergraduate entrepreneurship programs, certificate programs, and other College of Business offerings. Individualized plans of study have been developed for all currently enrolled students to ensure that those who maintain satisfactory academic progress are able to complete the program.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve Western Carolina University's request to discontinue the delivery of the Master of Innovation Leadership and Entrepreneurship (52.1499) effective spring 2026.

AGENDA ITEM

- A-4. Civil Discourse Initiatives in the UNC System David English
Melanie Escue, University of North Carolina Pembroke
Liz Le Grange, Constructive Dialogue Institute

Situation: Civil discourse is the practice of engaging across differences with respect, curiosity, and a shared commitment to truth-seeking and the common good. In higher education, where universities bring together students, faculty, and staff with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints, civil discourse is essential to academic inquiry, effective teaching and learning, and the preparation of graduates for civic and professional leadership. In recent years, national and campus-level trends have increased polarization and heightened the potential for disagreement to become disruptive or divisive, underscoring the need for clear expectations, skill-building, and consistent support for constructive dialogue. The UNC System and its institutions are therefore working to strengthen initiatives that promote a culture of open expression, respectful engagement, and productive problem-solving.

Background: Over the past several years, UNC System institutions have expanded efforts to support constructive dialogue and create learning environments where individuals can express differing views and engage one another thoughtfully. These efforts often include orientation and student success programming, faculty and staff professional development, facilitated dialogues and deliberative forums, speaker and event guidance, and partnerships with academic centers and community organizations focused on civic learning and engagement. While approaches vary by institution culture and local needs, the common goal is to reinforce the University's educational mission by building the skills and norms that help students and employees navigate disagreement, evaluate ideas on their merits, and participate in difficult conversations without intimidation or disruption.

This item provides an overview of current civil discourse initiatives across the UNC System, why they matter to student learning and campus climate, and examples of practices being implemented at institutions.

Assessment: Civil discourse and dialogue initiatives are critical to supporting a culture of free inquiry and expression at our colleges and universities.

Action: This item is for discussion only.



**THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM**

CIVIL DISCOURSE INITIATIVES

Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs

February 2026

Dr. David English, Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, UNC System

Dr. Melanie Escue, Assistant Professor & Lee Barnes Faculty Fellow, UNC Pembroke

Ms. Liz Le Grange, Vice President of Partnerships, Constructive Dialogue Institute

Overview: Free Expression on UNC System Campuses

Faculty generally do not push political agendas in class.

In courses where politics come up, students generally indicate that their instructor handled political discussions inclusively.

Students across the political spectrum want more opportunities to engage with those who think differently.

Both self-identified conservative students and self-identified liberal students indicate that their institution provides too few opportunities for constructive engagement.

Students are concerned about peer reactions when stating their sincere political views in class.

Self-censorship in class is more driven by anticipated peer response than faculty response.

Campus events that emphasize consensus-focused conversations are more appealing to students.

Students are more likely to engage in conversations that focus on agreement, occur in social settings, include relatively fewer people, and build rapport with their conversation partners.

When tensions are high, debate, don't isolate

 JULIANNA ROSELAND

DECEMBER 23, 2025

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College Students with backpacks UNC Source: Jacob Emmons, Carolina Journal

HIGHER EDUCATION

In Time of Campus Turmoil, More Colleges Try Teaching Civil Discourse

By Maggie Hicks Nov 4, 2024



Editorial: Can we talk? Colleges invest in civil discourse

TRIBLIVE WED, JAN 21, 2026 - 05:00 AM

SHARE LIKE



Civil Discourse in the Classroom Simple approaches to tough conversations.

By Lara Schwartz and Daniel Ritter



Campus Engagement Tip: Creating Forums for Civil Dialogue

Colleges and universities are exploring curricular and co-curricular settings to encourage critical thinking, free speech and respectful disagreement among students.

By Ashley Mowreader

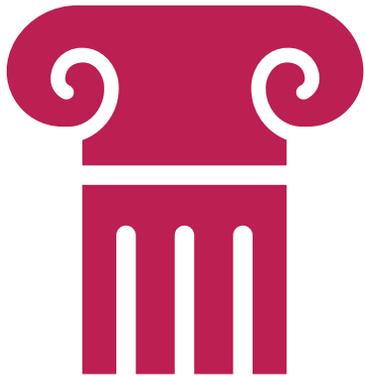
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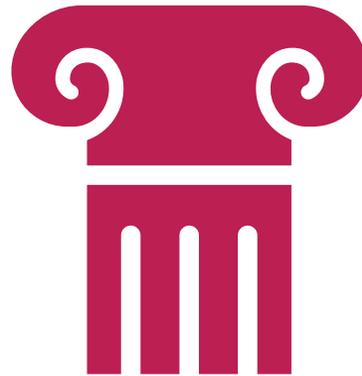
Defining Civil Discourse...

“The practice of deliberating about matters of public concern with others in a way that seeks to expand knowledge and promote understanding.”

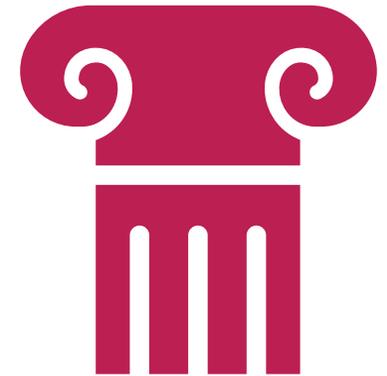
- Ohio State University Center for Ethics and Human Values



MUTUAL RESPECT

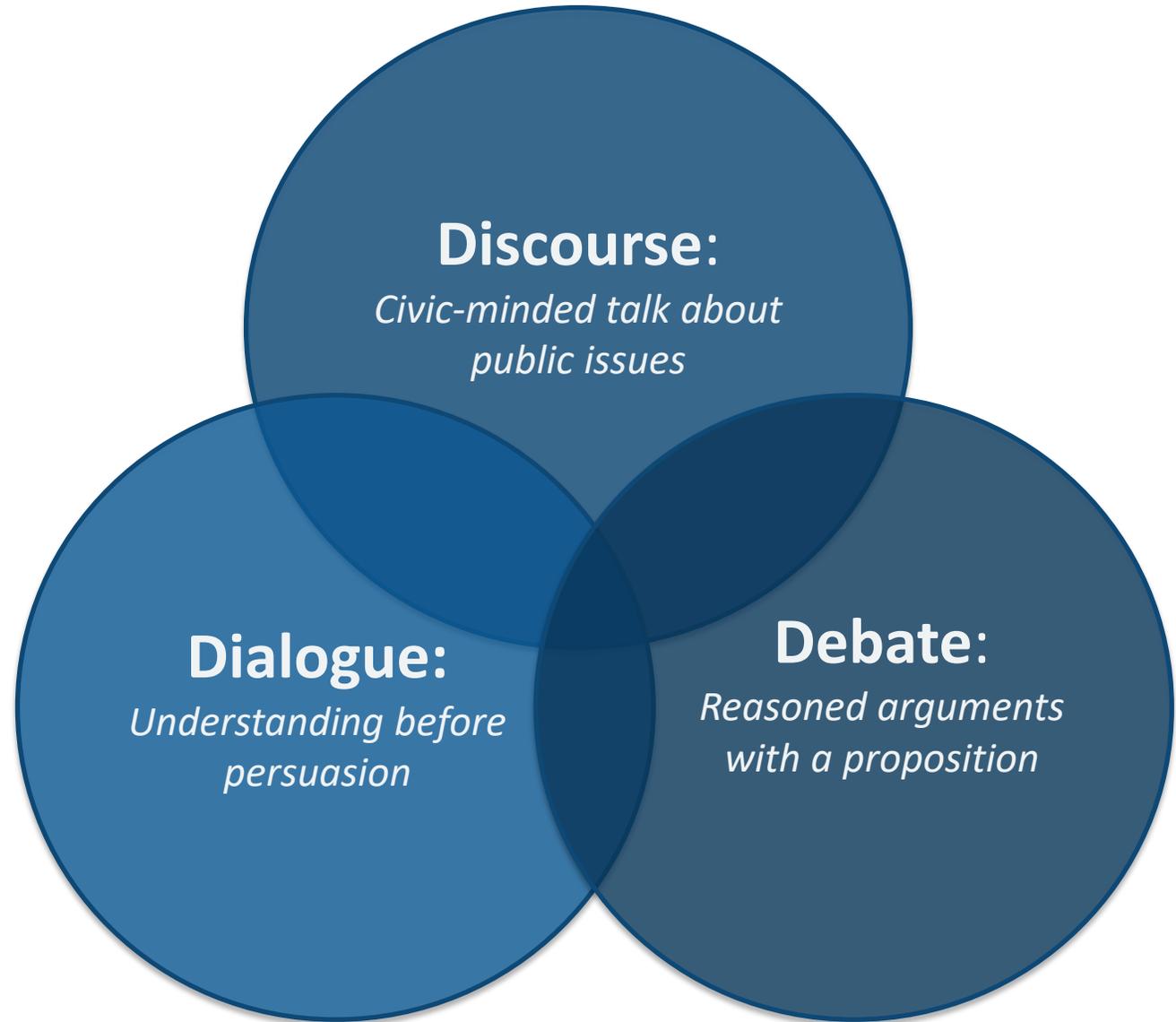


TRUST



IDENTIFYING
COMMON GROUND

Various Program Types



Discourse

- Oriented to the public good, not just politeness
- Listen, clarify, disagree without demeaning
- Commitment to evidence, honesty, and respect

Debate

- Goal is to test claims; weigh reasons and evidence
- Structured turns; emphasis on clarity and logic
- Can be competitive or “non-performative” (deliberative)

Dialogue

- Gain mutual understanding, curiosity, learning
- Assumes good faith; explores assumptions and lived experience
- Often facilitated and structured

PROGRAMS NATIONALLY

BridgeUSA 

heterodox
academy

 UNIFYAMERICA

 Collaborative
Discussion
PROJECT

 Constructive
Dialogue
Institute

 essential
PARTNERS

 INSTITUTE FOR
CITIZENS &
SCHOLARS™

 Braver Angels

THE
DISCUSSION
PROJECT 

Learn to Discuss • Discuss to Learn

Student- and faculty-generated dialogue and campus opportunities

Free Expression and Constructive Dialogue Task Force

CHARLOTTE CONVERSATIONALISTS



Fall 2024:
The Semester of Civics



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLOTTE

FREE EXPRESSION AND CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE TASK FORCE

PROGRAMS

Charlotte Conversationalists

Selected students are trained in the art of constructive dialogue to host various dialogues on campus.

Constructive Dialogue Faculty Learning Community

Teaching faculty how to incorporate constructive dialogue into their courses

INITIATIVES

Co-organized the first NC Campus Discourse Leaders Conference, which convened 19 campuses

Sponsored free expression mini-grants for faculty to promote constructive dialogue and viewpoint diversity on campus.

BridgeUNCG

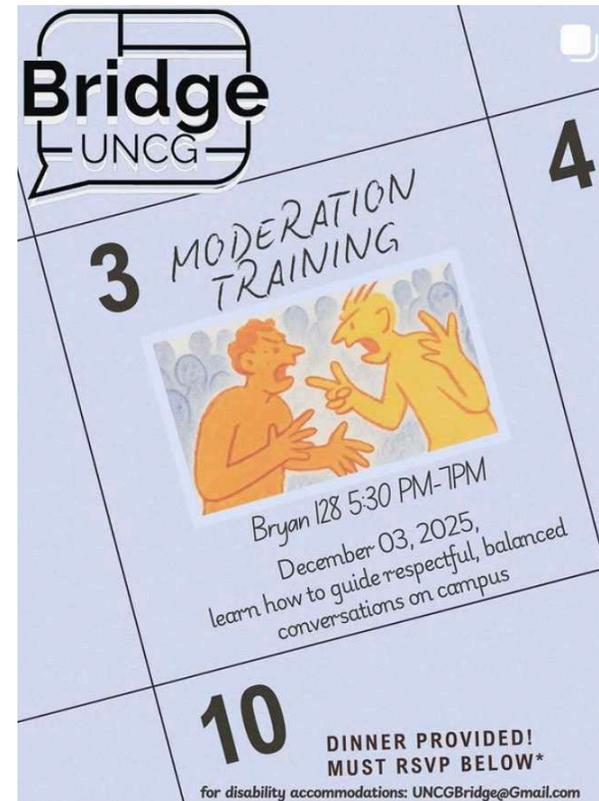


“Our work emphasizes the importance of **empathy and understanding, ideological diversity and solution-oriented politics.**”

Student-run, registered organization at UNCG

Engaged 220 students in 2025

“Middle Ground” format bringing together small groups with deeply opposing views



WINNER

**Bridge Builder
Impact Award**

*2025
BridgeUSA
Summit*

2024-25 Report on Free Speech and Free Expression within the University

- 1) Promoting and protecting free speech and expression remain commitments for UNC System institutions.
- 2) Disruption and interferences at scheduled expressive events have been minimal.
- 3) Institutions have developed and utilized mechanisms for receiving, investigating, and resolving complaints regarding alleged free expression policy violations.
- 4) UNC System institutions are regularly providing information to campus constituencies about rights and responsibilities associated with expression on campus through policies, training, and outreach.
- 5) The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) has awarded its highest rating of campus free speech policies to 14 out of 16 UNC System institutions.





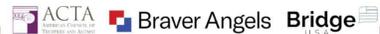
**COLLEGE DEBATES AND DISCOURSE:
BRAVER ANGELS AT UNC PEMBROKE**

Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs

Melanie Escue. Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Sociology

THE BARNES FAMILY FOUNDATION COLLEGE DEBATES & DISCOURSE PROGRAM IN NORTH CAROLINA

COLLEGE DEBATES AND
DISCOURSE ALLIANCE



BARNES
FAMILY FOUNDATION

- **College Debates and Discourse Alliance (CD&D) began in 2018**
 - Partnership between ACTA, Braver Angels, and BridgeUSA
 - Bringing civil debate and discourse to college campuses nationwide
 - Depolarization, collective search for truth, and respectful discussion is the goal
- **Lee Barnes Campus Debate Fellowship began in 2023**
 - Expanded the CD&D Program to 11 UNC System Institutions
 - Launched 259 debates and workshops and engaged 5,192 students
 - Faculty and student fellows play central role
- **Aligned with my own pedagogy**
 - I'm not here to impose beliefs on others. I do care about why you believe it and your ability to articulate your reasoning.
 - Focus on cultivating informed students who can engage respectfully with others.



A BRAVER ANGELS DEBATE FOR UNCP STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF

Does Government Assistance Sustain Intergenerational Poverty?

When: Wednesday, Sep. 24th at 5:30 pm

Where: JTH Upchurch Auditorium

 Pizza and refreshments provided at 5:30 pm; debate begins at 6:00 pm

For further info, contact:
Ronnie Williams at rw0034@bravemail.uncp.edu
or Ciara Smith at ces042@bravemail.uncp.edu

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Brought to you by the
COLLEGE DEBATES AND DISCOURSE ALLIANCE

LEE BARNES CAMPUS DEBATE FELLOWSHIP

- Intensive, financially supported, fellow training
- Faculty Training Timeline:
 - Summer 2024: Weeklong in person conference
 - Fall 2024: Trainings and weekly team meetings, shadowing classroom and campus debates and mock-chair training
 - Spring 2025: Weekly team meetings on scenario-based conflict control
 - Fall 2025–Spring 2026: Sustained supportive model with “as needed” training
- Student fellows receive intensive training over two semesters and sustained mentoring.

BRINGING CD&D TO UNCP



- Joined the Lee Barnes program in 2024, engaging 467 students.
- Enriches the institutional mission of UNCP as a public regional, teaching intensive, institution.
- BOT approved Resolution on Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech (November 10, 2023).
- Three areas of impact:
 - Campus Wide Events
 - Classroom Events / Curricular Integration
 - Co-Curricular Work

CAMPUS AND CLASSROOM EVENTS



- No winners or losers, all viewpoints respected, flattened hierarchy, light parliamentary style
- Two formats: Civil debate and ABCD workshop
- 5 campus-wide debates and dialogues (207 students)
 - Topics include intergenerational poverty, abortion, and AI in higher ed
 - Campus community are polled to ensure topic reflects issues important to them
- 11 classroom debates and dialogues (260 students)
 - Broad disciplinary reach: Sociology, Criminal Justice, Business, and Political Science
 - 3-day model: Program overview and expectations, research working day, and debate day

UNCP EXPANSION INTO CAREER PREPARATION

- Partnered with the Thomas College of Business and Economics:
 - Embed in the Co-curricular *Passport to Professional Success* program
 - Events open to all Thomas College of Business and Economics majors
 - Students earned "speaker credit" for participation at an online debate



Under what circumstances is it acceptable to use AI in higher education?

A Braver Campus Dialogue for UNC Pembroke students, faculty, and staff

WHEN: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5TH AT 5:30 PM
WHERE: UNIVERSITY CENTER ANNEX

Food will be provided at 5:30; Dialogue begins at 6:00 pm
For further info, contact Kai Anderson at kai002@bravermail.uncp.edu or Clara Smith at cs042@bravermail.uncp.edu

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CD&D

DOES AI DO MORE GOOD THAN HARM IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

A Braver Angels Debate for
The Thomas College of Business and Economics
Part of the Passport to Professional Success program

When: Thursday, Oct 9th
6:00 PM

Where: Online
(Zoom)

Zoom link will be sent to attendees before the debate start time of 6:00 pm

To register, use the QR code on this flyer
For more info, contact John Dunlap, Director of Professionalism, Internships and Career Preparation at John.Dunlap@uncp.edu

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COLLEGE DEBATORS AND DISCOURSE ALLIANCE

ACTA Braver Angels BridgeUSA

UNCP EXPANSION INTO FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

- Establish and spread connections to faculty:
 - Pre-semester meetings with curricular toolkit support
 - Support from CD&D team in co-planning meetings with faculty
 - Co-sponsored professional development workshop:
 - *Business, English, Library, Psychology, and Computer Science*





UNCP MOVING FORWARD

- Spring 2026:
 - 8 classroom debates
 - 2 campus-wide debates
- Second *Passport To Professional Success* debate
- Expansion to *Foundations of American Democracy*
- Expansion into STEM disciplines



Promoting Civil Discourse & Engagement on UNC Campuses

Ms. Liz Le Grange, Vice President of Partnerships





About CDI

The Constructive Dialogue Institute (CDI) is a non-partisan non-profit that partners with state systems, colleges, and universities to build the skills to support civil discourse on college campuses.



Our Reach

150+

Institutions

500,000+

Students Impacted

50

States

100+

Disciplines

1,000+

Educators

95%

of Professors Recommend















CDI & UNC System Collaboration

- **System-wide student perspective**
Engage the Association of Student Governments to surface student needs and priorities.
- **Stakeholder coordination**
Convene campus civil discourse leaders to align efforts, share learning, and reduce fragmentation.
- **Test before scale**
Pilot dialogue skill-building to generate data and inform future system decisions.
- **Build on existing assets**
Map current programs and expertise to leverage what campuses already have





**THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM**

OPPORTUNITIES AND NEXT STEPS

Peter Hans, President

David English, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

”

“While students are generally skeptical of university administration’s role in promoting free expression and constructive dialogue on campus, they typically view peers and faculty as contributing positively to the campus culture.”

https://fecdsurveyreport.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/22160/2022/08/FECD_Report_8-21-22.pdf

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SYSTEM

Grants for Course Development

Seed Funding for Student Organizations

Create and Award Annual Faculty Award
for Excellence in Civic Education

Training for Faculty and Staff

Free Expression Survey

Create UNC Systemwide Advisory Council
of Faculty, Staff, and Students
