

UNC System President Peter Hans
Remarks to the UNC Board of Governors
January 19, 2023

Faculty are the heart of any great university, and they are the heart and soul of this one. Every part of our mission — teaching, research, public service — relies on the brilliance and the dedication of our faculty. We're not the ones who cure diseases, inspire students, or break new ground in science and the humanities. We should support the people who do, to ensure that the University is a welcoming home for world-class scholars in every field.

When you ask any student, any parent, any North Carolinian to picture the work of a university professor, the first thing that comes to mind is teaching. That was the vision for this University when it was founded — that the young men and women of North Carolina would learn and discover along true scholars in every field. And as our mission holds, "Teaching and learning constitute the primary service that the University renders to society."

It's been a very long time since we've taken a close look at how we're valuing the people who do that extraordinary work. The university policies that govern faculty career tracks have been unchanged for decades, even as the scale of the university and the complexity of the work have grown significantly. As we look to the future of a great institution, it's time for a thorough review of how we support and assess our faculty.

Over the next few months, we'll be launching a series of working groups to review faculty career opportunities, teaching evaluation practices, our award and recognition programs, and post-tenure review policies. There's enormous variation among our campuses and even within our campuses when it comes to the way faculty are developed and supported. For many years, we've heard concerns from faculty advocates about inequities in workload, in review processes, and in the way service and teaching are weighed in faculty evaluations. It's time to bring greater clarity and fairness to the people who do such meaningful work on our campuses.

A thorough review, conducted by provosts, deans, faculty representatives, and System Office staff will help us modernize key aspects of faculty support.

- We'll address some of the challenges around fixed-term faculty, or adjuncts, ensuring that the scholars who carry much of the teaching responsibility on our campuses are treated with respect and have opportunities for advancement. It's past time that we develop a more rewarding career path for non-tenured faculty, and to make sure that the academic workload on our campuses is carried fairly.

- We'll work towards a more consistent way of evaluating teaching, aiming to reduce biased or arbitrary decisions about what constitutes quality in a classroom.
- We'll reassess the faculty awards and recognition programs run by the System Office, with the goal of doing more to celebrate the extraordinary range of accomplishment that we see from our scholars and researchers every year.
- We'll seek funding to establish faculty retirement incentives, a routine practice at many of our peer universities. Those incentives will make it easier for campus leaders to balance faculty workloads and invest in high-demand areas and meet student needs.
- And we'll aim for a more consistent approach to post-tenure review, ensuring fair workloads and standards of productivity. The wide discrepancy in review practices across campuses and departments is a source of tension among faculty, and it feeds a concern about workloads and career opportunities. Greater clarity here will bring greater confidence as we work to recruit and retain our best and brightest.

From day one of these discussions, we've worked side by side with the UNC System Faculty Assembly. Faculty Assembly Chair and UNC Greensboro professor Wade Maki is a co-leader of this effort, alongside David English from the System Office. I'm grateful to Wade and his colleagues for raising so many of these critical issues around faculty support. It turns out that philosophers like Wade make very good advocates — they know how to focus on first principles!

And the first principle of this work will be faculty excellence. That's the core strength of this University, and a prized asset for this state. So together, we can ensure that this university has the resources and the tools to remain a beacon of scholarship, service, and teaching for generations to come.