



June 5, 2026

The Board of Trustees is Damaging UNC Chapel Hill

On May 13th, 2026 the UNC Chapel Hill Board of Trustees (BoT) denied the appointment of Dr. Kiran Asher, a renowned women's and gender studies scholar, to the position of Distinguished Professor in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies.

The BoT has made no comment on this decision. But by approving 5 new hires and tenuring 27 current faculty at the same meeting, Trustees who denied Professor Asher appear to have voted based on political ideology.

There is an utter lack of professionalism exhibited by BoT members in failing to offer any reasons that the candidate dossier did not meet the standard of Full Professor. The BoT is hiding behind the disingenuous claim that this is a "personnel matter." The name of the professor is public, and an interview with her has been published in an article at WUNC.

We know that Dr. Asher's work met and exceeded the standards of a Full Professor (indeed a Distinguished Professorship) because the experts in the Women and Gender Studies department, UNC's Promotions and Tenure committee, and the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences had already vetted her credentials. By denying these decisions—carefully considered and at considerable cost of time and resources to dozens of faculty, students, and staff—the Board has disrespected UNC's established tenure and hiring process as well as sending a signal to future hires that their appointment, too, may be denied without explanation after having gone through the entire rigorous hiring process.

Reversing an appointment, when that expert's work or identity is disfavored by a political regime, is unacceptable. The Trustees' decision to override institutional vetting is a serious breach of the principle of academic freedom and the [policy of shared governance](#) that define this institution.

We, the members of the AAUP-UNC Chapel Hill chapter, demand the members of the Board of Trustees to reverse their vote to deny the appointment of Dr. Asher, but more broadly, we call on the BoT to respect shared governance and academic freedom, key principles that will allow UNC to continue as one of the best public universities in the world.

Background

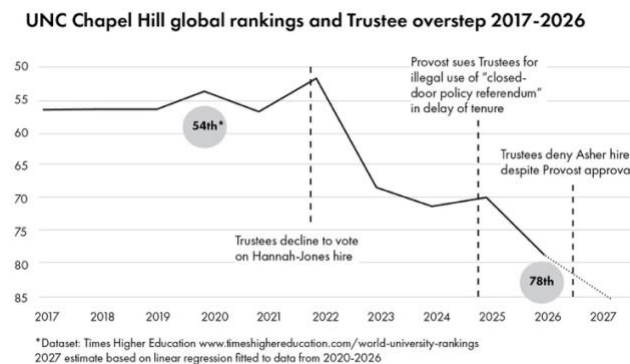
The UNC policy states that "The parameters of academic freedom include: Engaging in shared governance related to such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process." One such fundamental area related to the educational process is that faculty—the body with expertise—should select who is qualified to be hired.

Other discussions around this arbitrary decision have cited austerity measures - but this Trustee excuse denies fiscal reality. An [independent financial audit](#) found that UNC-CH is one of the most profitable and economically well-off universities in the country. After all, endless resources exist for the [scandal-ridden](#)

[School of Civil Life](#) and Leadership (SCiLL). The BoT rushed approvals for SCiLL appointments, even though the school [violated hiring procedures](#) - leading to a wave of resignations, a subsequent investigation and an (as of yet, unreleased \$1.2 million) report to investigate the hiring irregularities.

A disturbing pattern of BoT decisions has developed over the past few years. In 2021 the Board refused to vote to confer tenure on Nikole Hannah-Jones, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, a tenured position for which she had been recruited and heavily vetted. The outcry over that incident was swift and led to three immediate outcomes: Trustees were forced to reverse the decision; Hannah-Jones declined the job offer and moved to a new position at Howard University; UNC-Chapel Hill had to pay up to [\\$75,000 settlement](#) in a discrimination claim filed by NAACP.

Then, in March of 2025, the BoT also delayed the conferral of tenure to 33 professors, only voting on their cases after considerable [public pressure](#). Former Provost Chris Clemens served as [whistleblower](#) to the Trustees' use of tenure delay (and to the irregular hiring of football coach Bill Belichick). The Clemens lawsuit details that "What began as routine personnel review morphed into a closed-door policy referendum on whether tenure should exist at UNC-Chapel Hill and whether the Board should even vote on the pending recommendations."



The Hannah-Jones and Clemens lawsuits were also associated with a notable reputational hit. World rankings from the [Times Higher Education](#) shows that after five years among the top 60 universities globally, Chapel Hill plummeted to 69th in 2023. A second erosion in rankings took place after Trustees delayed tenure to a current 78th position. While these Trustee actions and global rankings cannot be interpreted as causation, there seems to be repeated intent on the part of Trustees to overstep the processes of hiring that are written into UNC policy.

When Trustees sidestep regulations and procedures, all North Carolinians lose out. The estimated 190,000 North Carolinian residents holding a UNC Chapel Hill degree will watch it devalue. Highly qualified scholars will stop applying to the university if approved appointments can be quietly reversed with no explanation. Lackluster rankings further erode donor and industry confidence, all of which worsen the state's research capacity.

Does institutional excellence matter at all to UNC's Trustees? As unelected representatives, perhaps their own professional trajectories do not hinge on the respect and prestige of their alma mater. As the Student Body President, a Trustee himself explains, the BoT's role in hiring is to [confirm the process](#), not debate the merits of candidates because they do not have sufficient expertise to evaluate academic qualifications. If Trustees can override university procedures and policies, there is no limit to the damage they can inflict on the university.