

Committee on the Status of Women
UNC Chapel Hill
June 24, 2021

Board of Trustees
UNC Chapel Hill

Dear Chair Stevens and other Members of the Board of Trustees,

We write to you as members of the UNC-Chapel Hill Committee on the Status of Women regarding your failure to review and approve the tenure case of Nikole Hannah-Jones. Our work is to advocate for the promotion and equitable treatment of faculty and staff at UNC who identify as women. The work of Ms. Hannah-Jones has been reviewed and lauded by individuals who are eminently qualified to evaluate her work, and by the strict process of tenure review she has been deemed to merit the award of tenure along with her appointment. The refusal to even review her work, follow the recommendations for tenure from APT committees at multiple levels of faculty governance, or openly communicate about why her case was not decided on is an affront to the academic integrity our institution has represented and constantly strives to maintain. The failure to approve the award of tenure, when other faculty appointed in the same manner to the Knight Professorship have been awarded this distinction, is inequitable and discriminatory treatment of a woman of color, compared to male peers.

While the implications of your inaction may be bearable for you, we as members of this UNC-Chapel Hill campus community, who live and work according to the institution's motto--Lux Libertas--or Light and Liberty, choose to uphold practices of transparency in decision making and support freedom with the protection of tenure for the most groundbreaking scholars like Nikole Hannah-Jones to pursue knowledge, teaching and service without repercussions based on differing political ideology of those in power. Tragically, several members of our committee have become aware of junior faculty not yet awarded tenure being advised not to individually sign onto letters of support or solidarity for Ms. Nikole Hannah-Jones out of fear of retaliation or having similar action taken against them should their tenure recommendations come before the Board of Trustees. This is unconscionable and casts a shadow of shame upon our institution that our faculty scholars cannot exercise their rights as members of faculty governance without fear of career reprisals. The University of North Carolina is recognized as the first public institution of higher learning in the United States; it is time we live up to that distinction. We implore you to act accordingly. We urge you to meet and vote affirmatively on the tenure case of Ms. Nikole Hannah-Jones.

Sincerely,
Members of the UNC Committee on the Status of Women