

The Faculty Council voted to postpone this resolution indefinitely on Nov. 3, 2023.

Resolution 2023-7. On The Rights and Responsibilities of Protesters

The Faculty Council finds:

The freedom to dissent, voice disagreement, and protest is a constitutional right and a central value of academic and intellectual freedom at the University, supporting its mission to foster critical thought and debate. The Code of the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina, Section 600, requires each constituent institution of the UNC System to “protect faculty and students in their responsible exercise of the freedom to teach, learn, and otherwise to seek and speak the truth.” The Code also requires faculty and students to “share in the responsibility for maintaining an environment in which academic freedom flourishes and in which the rights of each member of the academic community are respected.”

Lawful protests and peaceful assemblies are valid forms of expression that add to thought diversity, enhance the educational environment, and encourage social and political engagement. However, for the safety, freedom of movement, and academic welfare of students, faculty, and staff, protests and demonstrations must avoid violence, threats, or disruptions to the University’s main operations.

The chancellor has taken a strong position against any acts of violence on campus and has highlighted the University’s pledge to defend First Amendment rights, aiming to elevate the discourse and promote civil and informed debate.

The UNC system president, in a message to the chancellors, stated, “It is critical in times such as these that we continue to allow the lawful exercise of constitutionally protected rights while at the same time making every effort to ensure the safety of all members of our campus community, especially those who might be at the greatest risk of threat, intimidation, and violence.”

The Faculty Council resolves:

We call upon University administrators and trustees to:

1. Establish educational programs to educate faculty, staff, and students on federal and state laws, university policies, and their rights and responsibilities regarding academic freedom, free speech, institutional neutrality, and lawful protest;
2. Affirm and protect the right of students, faculty, and staff to participate in peaceful and lawful protests on campus, ensuring avenues for free expression; and
3. Strive to prudently ensure protests do not violate federal or state law or university policies.

We as faculty commit to leading by example, ensuring an environment where individuals of diverse backgrounds and perspectives can come together, listen, and learn from each other, ensuring every member of our academic community can freely and fully pursue their path to knowledge.

We support the chancellor’s and the UNC System president’s position against any acts of violence on campus and the University’s pledge to defend First Amendment rights, with the goal of elevating the discourse above hateful rhetoric and promote civil and informed debate.

We urge the University community to uphold these principles steadfastly, reinforcing the campus as a bastion of learning, free inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and respectful discourse, and to respond fairly and impartially to all incidents that may challenge these ideals.

Submitted by Prof. Mark McNeilly (Business)