

Report of the Committee on Academic Responsibility

December 11, 2007

Introduction

In March of 2007, the Student Advisory Committee to the Chancellor (SACC) presented a "Draft Report on Academic Responsibility" (Appendix A). The report's primary author was former Student Body Vice President Brian Phelps. The report urged the University to "take an active role in maintaining an atmosphere that promotes intellectual freedom and diverse perspectives," but noted that the SACC was not making any particular demands. Rather, the SACC's goal, as stated in the draft report, was "to engage in a constructive dialogue with faculty and administrators . . . to address concerns . . . [and] create a richer learning environment for Carolina students." (SACC Draft Report, p. 1).

The SACC Draft Report recommended that the Chancellor appoint a committee of faculty, students and administrators to explore the issue of academic responsibility. Specifically, the SACC Draft Report listed four objectives that UNC Chapel Hill should meet in order to ensure an appropriate classroom climate: (1) to enact policies that create an environment that encourages critical and respectful classroom dialogue; (2) to create an impartial and confidential conflict resolution process; (3) to improve faculty and student facilitation skills; and (4) to determine the extent to which classroom environment problems exist.

The Chancellor appointed Executive Associate Provost Steve Allred to chair the committee, who in turn appointed the following committee members:

Mr. Ronald Bilbao, undergraduate student

Ms. Ashley Groves, undergraduate student

Mr. Matthew Hendren, undergraduate student

Ms. Lauren Anderson, graduate student and President, Graduate and Professional Student Federation

Professor Frayda Bluestein, School of Government

Professor Karen Gil, Senior Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Professor Darryl Gless, Department of English and Comparative Literature, College of Arts and Sciences

Professor Ronald Straus, Department of Dental Ecology, School of Dentistry

Dr. Lynn Williford, Director, Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

Dr. Melissa Exum, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

The full committee met a number of times between April 24th and November 7th, 2007. In addition to full committee meetings, much of the committee's work was conducted through subcommittee meetings and email exchanges. This report constitutes the response of the committee to the SACC Draft Report, and is presented in four sections corresponding to the four objectives listed above.

Policies that Create an Appropriate Classroom Environment

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill mission statement provides, in part:

The mission of the University is to serve all the people of the State, and indeed the nation, as a center for scholarship and creative endeavor. The University exists to teach students at all levels in an environment of research, free inquiry, and personal responsibility; to expand the body of knowledge; to improve the condition of human life through service and publication; and to enrich our culture.

Mission statements from the various schools and departments across campus echo the University's broad commitment to maintaining an environment of free inquiry and personal responsibility. Further, the Trustee Policies and Regulations Governing Academic Tenure in The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provide a clear commitment to academic freedom and responsibility at Section 1, as follows:

Academic freedom is the right of a faculty member to be responsibly engaged in efforts to discover, speak and teach the truth. It is the policy of the University to maintain and encourage full freedom, within the law, of inquiry, discourse, teaching, research, and publication and to protect any member of the faculty against influences, from within or without the University, which would restrict the faculty member in the exercise of these freedoms in his or her area of scholarly interest.

The University recognizes that in his or her role as citizen, as to matters outside the area of his or her scholarly interest, the faculty member has the right to enjoy the same freedoms as other citizens, without institutional censorship or discipline, though he or she should avoid abuse of these freedoms. The faculty member should recognize that accuracy, forthrightness, and dignity befit his or her association with the University and his or her position as a person of learning. Except when officially authorized, a faculty member should not represent himself or herself as a spokesman for the University.

Thus, there are bedrock documents providing the foundation for academic freedom and responsibility across the University. One policy notably missing from Carolina is a speech code. Although consideration was given to the possibility of amending the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance in 1991 to include a speech code, those charged with examining that possibility wisely chose to avoid the constitutionally-suspect route of outlawing so-called "hate speech." Courts have repeatedly struck these speech codes down as either overbroad (prohibiting protected speech while attempting to restrict unprotected speech) or void for vagueness (failing to adequately inform one of what speech is permitted and what speech is barred, leaving one to guess at the policy's application). See, e.g., *Doe v. University of Michigan*, 721 F. Supp. 852 (E.D. Mich. 1989); *UWM Post v. Board of Regent of the University of Wisconsin*, 774 F. Supp. 1163 (E.D. Wis. 1991); cf. *R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul*, 505 U.S. 377 (1992).

Notwithstanding the lack of any speech codes, there has long existed an ethos, tradition and practice of respectful dialogue and thoughtful exchange throughout the University. Indeed, in the mid-nineteenth century professors at UNC challenged their students on difficult issues involving slavery and religion. The Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies, part of UNC student life for over 150 years, enshrined the tradition of robust yet

respectful discourse. Building on traditions begun in the early Twentieth Century, the Campus Y promotes “the pursuit of social justice through a cultivation of pluralism” (Carolina First statement, p. 1). It is difficult to estimate the full depth and breadth of student involvement in the Campus Y, but the organization counts 1,500 students as fee-paying members. Service takes place through committees of varying size and activity level, but which generally promote a climate of comfortable conversation in and out of the classroom. A representative listing of Campus Y committees is included as Appendix B.

In addition to the student-driven initiatives for responsible discourse from the Campus Y, two recent faculty/administration initiatives should be noted. In 1997, the Chancellor’s Task Force on Intellectual Climate issued an influential report with three overriding recommendations: (1) that the educational experience at Carolina should be student-centered with an emphasis on learning how to learn; (2) that intellectual exchange should be woven seamlessly into everyday campus life; and (3) that education should extend beyond the walls of the University into the community and across the state. In 2003, the University’s first Academic Plan presaged the SACC’s call for academic responsibility, stating (p. 7):

Carolina consistently demonstrates that it has the courage of its convictions to do what is right, as a public university, even if those values are not fully understood by the public. The University has valiantly championed freedom of speech, expression, and inquiry. It has supported pioneering research leading to significant social change, notably including race relations in the South. A hallmark of Carolina is to be a place leading the discussion of vital social and ethical issues and subjecting dogmas and dictums to the light of truth and reason.

Also of recent note is the Diversity Plan Baseline Report of July 1, 2007, which found that “[w]hile most units reported efforts to create and sustain a climate where respectful discussions of diversity could occur, few described specific initiatives or practices that specifically encouraged large numbers of students, faculty and staff to engage in these discussions.” (p. 15). In addition, the August 1, 2006 Diversity Plan noted that “[a]lthough most members of the University community say they feel comfortable in discussions, dialogue about diversity issues appears to be limited. Particular problems with promoting respectful discussion exist in the classroom.” (p. 6). There have been subsequent efforts to improve the classroom and campus climate, particularly through programs offered by the Diversity and Multicultural Affairs Office. One program of note is the Minority Student Recruitment Committee, which uses current students to reach out to minority students.

Students also started new programs in response to the Diversity Report. One of the most prominent is Carolina United, a student-led collaboration with the Office of Student Affairs, the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, and the Parents Council. Carolina United holds a five-day retreat at Camp Chestnut Ridge each August for 60 student leaders. The retreat uses structured conversations co-led by students and members of the university community. A broad range of topics are covered, including sexual orientation, dealing with political, racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economic differences, and other issues on which participants and the broader student body may disagree. Almost universally, participants love their experience at Carolina United and leave the retreat feeling much more comfortable speaking across difference.

This year, Student Government has also sponsored a forum on diversity called the “Melting Pot,” which allowed for conversation about the state of campus diversity. The event attracted 50 students and provoked spirited exchange, with students wanting better opportunities to interact. Finally, the Student Advisory Committee to the Chancellor has been working on launching a “Take Back the Pit” group which will be working towards promoting constructive dialogue in response to the “pit preacher” problem, attempting to respond to shouting and provocation with constructive dialogue.

Although much has been done to promote academic responsibility and the creation of an open and respectful environment at UNC, members of the committee suggested that we continue to explore possibilities to better coordinate outreach efforts, design metrics to measure success, provide more opportunities for interaction between students and faculty, and examine best practices of other universities.

Improving Faculty and Student Facilitation Skills

As shown by the survey results described in part four of this report, manifestations of classroom incivility among students and of intimidating or coercive behavior by faculty occur rarely at UNC Chapel Hill. Though rare, those moments can be significant for the immediate participants and are therefore worth preventing or mitigating whenever possible. The University provides resources that enable faculty to do this. Instructors who realize that they need to improve their techniques for dealing with potentially controversial issues or managing conflict appear to enjoy adequate support. The obvious place to turn is the Center for Teaching and Learning. The Center provides both printed resources and individual consultations.

Two of the Center’s concise documents in the series “For Your Consideration” bear directly on the issue: “Teaching Controversial Issues” and “Managing Classroom Conflict.” Both offer suggestions on ways to forestall possible conflicts and to manage conflicts effectively if they do occur. The techniques proposed constitute features of effective teaching in any context — things such as providing clear policies and guidelines, projecting an attitude of caring about the students and their success, learning and using their names, listening attentively to their comments, soliciting feedback, etc. These publications also refer to numerous web-based and printed sources of further suggestions grounded in pedagogical research.

Although the Center for Teaching and Learning does not keep records of specific problems faculty bring to its consultants, Dr. Ed Neal, for many years a senior consultant at the Center, reports that he receives two or three cases a year that would qualify as “difficult conversations.” Dr. Neal guesses that the other consultants have about the same number. It is clear that these consultations are readily available to faculty who recognize that they need them. Even though Dr. Neal could not offer hard data on the matter, his impression, grounded in many years of experience here, is that “the problem is not terribly significant or widespread.” Cases such as that of a lecturer who a few years ago sent an inappropriate email to her class was, in his view, a rare situation, “spectacular . . . [but probably not] symptomatic of a larger problem.” He adds that “it would not have occurred had she consulted with us before sending that notorious e-mail to her class.”

This comment may highlight a not insignificant issue: If faculty members don’t know they have a problem, they are unlikely to seek advice from the Center or elsewhere. It is true

that there are many ways in which potentially problematic faculty behaviors can come to the attention of departmental administrators. For untenured tenure-track faculty in the College, annual reviews by their chairs should catch such problems as they do other, more commonplace difficulties of novice professors. Chairs commonly refer such inexperience colleagues to the Center.

It may, however, be worth paying greater attention to feedback on the classroom performance of instructors who are not on the tenure track. The processes for those ranks are, most likely, less fully regularized. Monitoring and mentoring of graduate-student instructors is, in some departments, systematic and attentive. It may be worth looking into those processes across the University's instructional units to be sure they are consistently sound, and sensitive to the issue of intellectual openness in all classrooms.

One innovative program at UNC Chapel Hill, funded by the Ford Foundation, seeks to examine classroom conflict or incivility or intellectual coerciveness and to produce a report on best practices for dealing with such matters. That program, the Difficult Dialogues Initiative, is now in process and is capably led by Danielle Doughman. There are several courses in a number of departments being taught under the heading of Difficult Dialogues, which cluster in certain areas of study (biology, literature, religious studies, for example) and are to undergo a special evaluation soon.

Because the Difficult Dialogues initiative has time-limited Ford funding, the Provost has asked the Center for Teaching and Learning to assist with continuing the program. This move is part of a larger plan to merge the Center with the new Center for Faculty Excellence in 2008, whose mission will be to provide a set of resources that faculty may use to facilitate their success in teaching, research, and leadership, serve as a locus of faculty professional life on campus, and help to further achievement of the University's academic goals and priorities. The new Center will expand faculty opportunities to learn best practices for forestalling or managing classroom conflicts and subjecting contentious issues to constructive and authentically academic conversation.

Creation of an Impartial and Confidential Conflict Resolution Process

There is no single, established formal process for resolution of student complaints about instructor behavior. Clearly, a reasonable course of action is for the student to voice his or her concern directly to the instructor, but students may not always be comfortable doing so. The appropriate department chair or dean would normally be the recipient of student complaints. On occasion, a student might voice concern to his or her Resident Assistant (if the student lives in a residence hall). Alternatively, a student may present a complaint directly to the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs, either to Melissa Exum, Winston Crisp, or Melinda Manning. These individuals are well-trained in dealing with student concerns in a confidential and comprehensive manner, and have dealt with student complaints in the past. They typically refer the student to the faculty member, the appropriate department chair or dean, or even to counseling services. Dr. Exum reported to the Committee that Dean of Students Office has provided assistant to approximately 35 students (graduate and undergraduate) between January of 2005 and December of 2007.

The Committee commends the Office of Student Affairs for its willingness and capacity to hear student concerns, including those arising from classroom experiences. We are concerned, however, that students might not know where to turn in the event they wished to discuss an issue or to present a complaint. There is a need for greater publicity and clarity in the student complaint process.

A subcommittee met with Wayne Blair and Laurie Mesibov of the UNC Chapel Hill Ombuds Office to find out more about the services they provide. The University Ombuds office was created upon recommendation of the Chancellor's Task Force For a Better Workplace, and handles only employment related issues. Issues involving student or faculty conduct unrelated to university employment are outside the scope of the Ombuds office services.

The Ombuds office sometimes hears from students and faculty members about issues of classroom environment, but due to their limited jurisdiction they simply refer individuals to other resources on campus. Blair and Mesibov noted, however, that there is no student resource on campus that has the characteristics of the Ombuds office (neutral, confidential, and statutorily-protected from any obligation to disclose the substance of conversations to the administration).

The subcommittee heard from Wayne Blair about his experience at Columbia, where he served as a staff member in a comprehensive Ombuds office. His view, based on that experience, is that it is preferable to have an office that is comprehensive (i.e., not limited to employees and employment-related issues). This type of office has the potential to provide broad support to the community as a whole, and to address politically sensitive issues in a confidential setting that is focused on relationships and uses a mediation approach.

Mr. Blair noted that the Ombuds office would provide an additional choice for students who may feel uncomfortable raising their concerns through other academic structures, such as the faculty member, department chair, or Student Affairs. In the same way that the Ombuds office provides a parallel process with the University Human Resources Office, it could provide a resource that is complementary to student affairs. If the Ombuds Office was expanded to include non-employment related issues, at least one additional staff member would be needed.

The Committee recommends that there be further discussion with the Chancellor, the Provost, the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and the Chancellor's Cabinet on the merits of expanding the jurisdiction of the Ombuds office to handle nonemployment-related issues between students and faculty. Even though the survey results described in part four do not indicate a significant problem at present, the availability of a confidential, neutral, and independent service for specific cases could (1) help resolve cases that arise when students or faculty are not comfortable with current structures; (2) help identify particular faculty members or students who need assistance in dealing with controversial issues or difficult classroom situations; and (3) create a permanent, readily available, confidential resource for those who perceive that there is a problem, reducing the possibility that either an actual problem or a perception of a problem, would have a chance to flourish on this campus. With this resource, along with the existing resources in Student Affairs, the University may be in a better position to respond to specific incidents or more broad-based concerns.

Determining the Nature and Extent of the Problem

As part of their data gathering efforts, the Committee members, led by Karen Gil and Ronald Bilbao, developed a short survey to learn more about the perceptions and experiences of students related to the concept of academic responsibility. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) provided technical assistance with the survey project. OIRA staff designed a web-based instrument made up of Likert scale and open-ended questionnaire items. A copy of the instrument is included as Appendix C. To protect anonymity, the web survey was designed so that submitted responses automatically entered a secure server in the OIRA. No information that could be used to identify respondents was collected or retained.

On Friday, September 28, 2007, the OIRA emailed an invitation to participate in the survey and the URL to a simple random sample of 5,000 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students enrolled in the fall 2007 semester. An email reminder was sent several days later. By the close of the survey site on October 11th, a total of 964 responses had been received for an overall response rate of 19%. Response rates were 21% for undergraduate students and 16% for graduate and professional students. A copy of the survey is included as Appendix C.

What follows is a summary of the responses to each of the quantitative and open-ended survey items. The Committee is particularly appreciative of the excellent work of Dr. Lynn Williford, whose analysis provides the basis for this part of the report. Note that participants were instructed to respond to questions 1-5 based on the majority of their classroom experiences at Carolina.

1. Instructors at the University generally maintain an atmosphere that promotes intellectual freedom and welcomes diverse perspectives.

Results from All Respondents

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
All Respondents	25	2.6%	27	2.8%	467	48.4%	437	45.3%	8	0.8%

Results by Level

Level	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Undergraduate	12	1.8%	17	2.5%	336	50.1%	301	44.9%	4	0.6%
Graduate/Professional	12	4.2%	10	3.5%	127	44.1%	135	46.9%	4	1.4%

Results by Undergraduate Class

Class	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
First Year	6	2.1%	5	1.8%	129	45.3%	143	50.2%	2	0.7%
Sophomore	3	1.6%	8	4.3%	102	55.4%	70	38.0%	1	0.5%
Junior	5	4.0%	4	3.2%	66	53.2%	48	38.7%	1	0.8%
Senior	0	0.0%	2	2.1%	50	51.5%	45	46.4%	0	0.0%

Results by Political View

Political View	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Far Left	2	3.8%	0	0.0%	18	34.6%	31	59.6%	1	1.9%
Liberal	11	3.0%	6	1.6%	173	47.0%	178	48.4%	0	0.0%
Middle-of-the-road	4	1.2%	11	3.3%	169	50.6%	147	44.0%	3	0.9%
Conservative	7	3.6%	8	4.1%	103	53.1%	73	37.6%	3	1.5%
Far right	0	0.0%	2	40.0%	1	20.0%	2	40.0%	0	0.0%

2. Teaching assistants at the University generally maintain an atmosphere that promotes intellectual freedom and welcomes diverse perspectives.

Results from All Respondents

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
All Respondents	25	2.6%	41	4.3%	444	46.3%	340	35.4%	110	11.5%

Results by Level

Level	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Undergraduate	16	2.4%	35	5.2%	339	50.7%	247	37.0%	31	4.6%
Graduate/Professional	8	2.8%	5	1.7%	103	36.0%	91	31.8%	79	27.6%

Results by Undergraduate Class

Class	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
First Year	7	2.5%	9	3.2%	146	51.4%	99	34.9%	23	8.1%
Sophomore	3	1.6%	13	7.1%	99	54.1%	64	35.0%	4	2.2%
Junior	6	4.8%	11	8.9%	56	45.2%	48	38.7%	3	2.4%
Senior	1	1.0%	2	2.1%	49	51.0%	40	41.7%	4	4.2%

Results by Political View

Political View	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Far Left	1	1.9%	0	0.0%	16	30.8%	28	53.8%	7	13.5%
Liberal	12	3.3%	16	4.4%	161	43.9%	135	36.8%	43	11.7%
Middle-of-the-road	4	1.2%	11	3.3%	171	51.4%	107	32.1%	40	12.0%
Conservative	8	4.2%	12	6.3%	91	47.4%	62	32.3%	19	9.9%
Far right	0	0.0%	2	40.0%	2	40.0%	1	20.0%	0	0.0%

3. My classmates create an environment that makes me feel safe being open and honest in expressing my opinions.

Results from All Respondents

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
All Respondents	33	3.4%	72	7.5%	545	56.6%	301	31.3%	12	1.2%

Results by Level

Level	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Undergraduate	19	2.8%	45	6.7%	420	62.8%	180	26.9%	5	0.7%
Graduate/Professional	13	4.5%	27	9.4%	120	41.7%	121	42.0%	7	2.4%

Results by Undergraduate Class

Class	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
First Year	5	1.8%	11	3.9%	191	67.3%	76	26.8%	1	0.4%
Sophomore	6	3.3%	16	8.7%	118	64.1%	43	23.4%	1	0.5%
Junior	8	6.5%	8	6.5%	71	57.3%	35	28.2%	2	1.6%
Senior	1	1.0%	11	11.3%	56	57.7%	28	28.9%	1	1.0%

Results by Political View

Political View	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Far Left	4	7.7%	5	9.6%	18	34.6%	23	44.2%	2	3.8%
Liberal	15	4.1%	22	6.0%	213	57.9%	113	30.7%	5	1.4%
Middle-of-the-road	6	1.8%	29	8.7%	194	58.1%	102	30.5%	3	0.9%
Conservative	8	4.1%	14	7.3%	113	58.5%	57	29.5%	1	0.5%
Far right	0	0.0%	1	20.0%	2	40.0%	2	40.0%	0	0.0%

4. I perceive the classroom environment at UNC to be open and welcoming to independent and provocative points of view.

Results from All Respondents

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
All Respondents	33	3.4%	48	5.0%	511	53.2%	356	37.1%	12	1.3%

Results by Level

Level	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Undergraduate	18	2.7%	30	4.5%	369	55.2%	246	36.8%	5	0.7%
Graduate/Professional	14	4.9%	17	5.9%	139	48.6%	109	38.1%	7	2.4%

Results by Undergraduate Class

Class	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
First Year	6	2.1%	9	3.2%	156	54.7%	111	38.9%	3	1.1%
Sophomore	6	3.3%	9	4.9%	108	59.0%	58	31.7%	2	1.1%
Junior	7	5.7%	6	4.9%	68	55.3%	42	34.1%	0	0.0%
Senior	0	0.0%	7	7.2%	50	51.5%	40	41.2%	0	0.0%

Results by Political View

Political View	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Cannot Rate	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Far Left	3	5.8%	3	5.8%	21	40.4%	23	44.2%	2	3.8%
Liberal	14	3.8%	14	3.8%	194	53.0%	139	38.0%	5	1.4%
Middle-of-the-road	7	2.1%	17	5.1%	184	55.3%	122	36.6%	3	0.9%
Conservative	9	4.7%	12	6.2%	105	54.4%	66	34.2%	1	0.5%
Far right	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	80.0%	1	20.0%	0	0.0%

5. I have experienced situations, or have witnessed situations, in which the classroom environment seemed unwelcoming to or hindered the expression of provocative or unpopular ideas.

Results from All Respondents

	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
All Respondents	138	14.4%	822	85.6%

Results by Level

Level	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Undergraduate	87	13.0%	580	87.0%
Graduate/Professional	50	17.4%	237	82.6%

Results by Undergraduate Class

Class	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
First Year	19	6.7%	265	93.3%
Sophomore	27	14.8%	155	85.2%
Junior	22	17.7%	102	82.3%
Senior	22	22.7%	75	77.3%

Results by Political View

Political View	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Far Left	12	23.1%	40	76.9%
Liberal	53	14.5%	312	85.5%
Middle-of-the-road	57	17.1%	276	82.9%
Conservative	14	7.2%	180	92.8%
Far right	1	20.0%	4	80.0%

6. If you answered "yes" to item #5, please provide information on the specific incidents. It is important that you be specific about whether the incident involved faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and/or student peers and that you specify the actions (or failure to act) that inhibited dialogue. Please also include what you did in response to the situation.

About 13% of the undergraduate respondents and 17% of graduate and professional student respondents reported that they had experienced or witnessed a situation in which some element of the classroom environment had inhibited dialogue or free expression of ideas. The majority of those respondents chose to elaborate on their experiences. While graduate and professional students tended to write longer, more detailed descriptions of these experiences, most of the issues raised were similar to those cited by the undergraduates.

In general, these descriptions of classroom incidents revealed student perceptions that that there was a preferred point of view on some issues, and that there were negative consequences for individuals who disagreed with that view or expressed alternative views. The dominating perspectives were sometimes those labeled as "politically

correct,” and at other times represented ideas expressed by the instructor and/or the majority of students in the class. The types of experiences described as inhibiting dialogue tended to fall into one or more of the following categories:

- The atmosphere in some classrooms appeared to reinforce the expression of only “politically correct” perspectives in discussions. Respondents reported feeling pressured to refrain from espousing differing viewpoints that might result in their being viewed as uninformed or “wrong.” In particular, students perceived that expressions of conservative views were likely to be labeled as politically incorrect and therefore inappropriate.
- Some instructors expressed strong personal opinions on issues related to the subject matter in a way that led students to perceive that differing opinions would not be welcomed. Respondents reported witnessing situations in which instructors reacted to comments that were inconsistent with their own views by being dismissive or ignoring those students in later discussions. A few situations were described in which the instructor responded to students who offered alternative viewpoints with remarks that were seen as rude, condescending, or inferring that the student was “closed-minded.”
- A few instructors reportedly shared views that appeared to reflect bias and prejudice towards specific individuals and groups based on political beliefs, religion, race, gender, or sexual orientation. Examples given involved instructors who appeared to promote liberal or pro-gay positions, and those whose views were described as anti-Christian or anti-religious.
- Other students in the classroom sometimes inhibited dialogue by responding in a judgmental or disrespectful manner to students who offered opposing perspectives. Respondents described situations in which they had felt belittled when their peers laughed at their comments or “attacked” their conservative beliefs.
- Some instructors appeared to lack skills in managing class discussions, resulting in either insufficient opportunities for quality dialogue or failure to maintain a respectful environment for student participation. Some instructors, particularly TA’s, seemed uncertain about how to balance class time for lecture and discussion and sometimes appeared uncomfortable or frustrated when students asked questions or interjected comments. Other incidents were reported in which respondents became reluctant to participate in discussions because the instructor did not seem to be able to control the inappropriate behavior of other students in the class.

Students who reported having experienced or witnessed a situation in which classroom discussion was inhibited were asked to describe what they did in response to the incident. When students perceived that the instructor was intolerant of divergent points of view, they sometimes dropped the class. However, more often they described simply avoiding contact with the instructor by not seeking help during office hours and limiting their comments in class. Those who had felt harshly criticized by classmates reported feeling intimidated and ultimately becoming silent out of fear of saying something that would result in a “backlash” from their peers. A few respondents reported trying to

support peers they perceived to be attacked unfairly, but many reacted by reducing their own contributions to classroom discussion. Graduate and professional student comments suggested that they were somewhat less sensitive to and inhibited by unpleasant classroom discourse than undergraduates.

7. Please provide any additional comments for the Task Force and include any ideas that you have on how the University can address these issues.

A number of respondents commented that there were no significant problems with the classroom environment at Carolina, and that some conflict was inevitable in any academic setting. They praised the intellectual openness and support for critical thinking and divergent views that seem to characterize UNC-Chapel Hill. Several students encouraged the University to continue to pursue its commitment to diversity and to review other policies to support an open academic environment. Additional comments included suggestions for improving the classroom environment such as providing training for all instructors to ensure that they can respond effectively to classroom conflicts without suppressing the exchange of ideas. The following is a summary of major points made by respondents.

- Students suggested that instructors should model academic responsibility in the classroom. At the beginning of the course, instructors should openly state that all opinions are welcomed and discuss the need for all members of the class to demonstrate respect for the contributions of their peers.
- Mandatory training was recommended to help instructors (faculty and TAs) learn to lead sensitive classroom discussions. In addition, training should focus on helping instructors become more aware of their own biases and how to manage them in a way that does not result in silencing their students.
- Respondents suggested that the University place a priority on recruiting instructors and TAs with a commitment to excellence in teaching and to continuous improvement of the instructional process.
- Other students suggested that the University community should expand its efforts to encourage diversity by recruiting more international students and faculty. In addition, the recruitment process should also focus on enhancing diversity in terms of intellectual perspective and political thought.

Respondent Demographics

Degree Level:		
	n	%
Undergraduate	670	69.9%
Graduate/Professional	288	30.1%

Class:		
	n	%
First Year	285	41.3%
Sophomore	184	26.7%
Junior	124	18.0%
Senior	97	14.1%

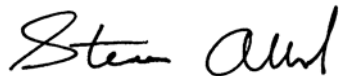
Political Views:		
	n	%
Far Left	52	5.5%
Liberal	368	38.6%
Middle-of-the-road	334	35.0%
Conservative	194	20.4%
Far right	5	0.5%

Conclusion

The Committee appreciates the opportunity to respond to the SACC Draft Report, which we found to be thoughtful, well-written, and useful. Our assessment is that inappropriate behavior in the classroom is a rare occurrence at Carolina, but not an unknown occurrence. Given the size of the University, it would be naïve to think that no one would ever commit a slight, unintentional or otherwise, to another person during the course of a semester.

In light of our findings, we recommend (1) that efforts to promote understanding and respectful dialogue, such as the annual Carolina United retreat, continue to be supported; (2) that SACC, Student Affairs, and others continue to monitor practices of other universities, and to continue to track incidents of inappropriate conduct and make an annual report to the SACC; (3) that the Difficult Dialogues initiative and the Diversity Plan initiatives continue to be fully supported; (4) that further consideration be given to publicizing and perhaps enhancing appeal processes, including the possibility of expanding the jurisdiction of the Ombuds Office; and (5) that every effort continue to be made to ensure that Carolina is a welcoming, open place, where civil discourse thrives.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Allred". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Allred
Executive Associate Provost and Committee Chair

Appendix A. Draft Report on Academic Responsibility from the Student Advisory Committee, March 2007

DRAFT

OBJECTIVES

- For the University to enact policies that help create an environment that encourages critical and respectful academic dialogue in its classrooms among its students and faculty
- The creation of an impartial and confidential process that gives students a means to resolve conflicts they may have with a faculty member
- To improve faculty and student facilitation skills
- To find ways to evaluate and quantify the problem to minimize the occurrence of repeated complaints

TERMINOLOGY

The way we discuss this issue and the words we use to describe this phenomenon are just as important as addressing it. Therefore, we have chosen the term "Academic Responsibility" to broadly define the issues we are talking about.

Students have a responsibility to make every effort to learn what the faculty member is teaching, and they have a responsibility to ask questions about the material to ensure they are acquiring the critical thinking skills the University aims to impart. Students also have a responsibility to respectfully critique the ideas of their peers.

Faculty have a responsibility to create a learning environment that encourages the free and respectful exchange of knowledge, and they have a responsibility to critically analyze the ideas of their students to ensure they stand up to rigorous scholarly scrutiny.

The term "Academic Freedom" connotes that students are free to whatever opinions they may hold. However, we are not guaranteeing students' right to have any careless opinion in the classroom without evidence or support. Rather, we hope to guarantee the right for a responsible academic and civil discourse when the classroom environment lends itself appropriate to such a dialogue.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

The classroom environment at the University of North Carolina should be one where students and faculty are encouraged to express unique perspectives and defend them against rigorous and respectful academic scrutiny from their peers and from their superiors without fear of being ridiculed, belittled, or marked down for introducing those ideas. Indeed, it is only through the ability to introduce new, diverse,

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and unique theories that society can hope to solve the most complex scientific and social problems of our time.

Whether or not this problem exists is not the issue at hand. The question we should be asking is whether or not the perception of this problem exists on this campus and many students feel that it does. If a faculty member fails to foster an environment in the classroom where students feel they are free to ask provocative questions - even if those questions are actually welcome - the quality of learning for all students in that class suffers because they are not exposed to each others' ideas.

While some faculty make an effort to encourage students to think in new and provocative ways, this atmosphere does not exist in all classrooms at the University. In fact, some faculty members, in effect, discourage their students from independent academic inquiry and compel them to adopt a rigid framework when thinking about particular societal problems. In some cases, these faculty belittle those students who do not conform to their way of thinking, and in other instances, punish those students through grading policies.

While this problem may not be as widespread as some students and political commentators suggest, it is nonetheless a real issue that the University should take seriously.

With this in mind, **it is important to realize that such impediments to free student inquiry do not only exist along the political lines in the way it is generally discussed.** Students dealing with sensitive international issues, minority students in majority white classes, and white students in African American Studies classes have expressed these same concerns. **This perception exists across political lines and across many disciplines.**

The missing element in these classrooms is the proper facilitation skills necessary to create a comfortable environment for all students to feel they are able to share their analysis - or a lack of will to implement those skills. The freedom to have strong ideas and the ability to create an atmosphere for others to share their thoughts and critique the opinions of others are not mutually exclusive. It is possible, and it is essential, for the University to foster a culture encouraging its members to do both.

The University must work to preserve the free exchange of diverse ideas in its classrooms and on its campus. By shielding ourselves from new perspectives, we are doing a disservice to all members of the University community and to the people of the state we aim to serve.

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POTENTIAL OPTIONS

Below are potential tangible steps the University could take to help mitigate the problems of Academic Responsibility noted in this report. The Student Advisory Committee to the Chancellor is not demanding that any of these particular steps are taken. We believe that better and more sustainable solutions can be reached when the interested parties are involved in the decision making process. However, we include these options to help promote dialogue between students and administrators and as ways that the Committee believes could begin to move the University in a direction away from the problems in this report and closer to the aforementioned goals. Nonetheless, the Committee believes that it is important for the University administration to take this issue seriously and to enact policies that show students their commitment to helping resolve these concerns.

- The Provost or Chancellor could draft a letter to faculty explaining the importance of this issue and encourage faculty members to conduct their classes in such a way that welcomes students to engage in critical academic dialogue in the classroom.
- Create a committee of faculty, students, and administrators to explore the current process for students to resolve conflicts with faculty members, and if deemed appropriate, make recommendations to the Provost or Chancellor about how the University could better meet this need.
 - Adequately publicize the procedure for resolving disputes
- Create a method to assist those professors who are not as skilled at facilitating this type of classroom interaction. Possible participants include:
 - Center for Teaching and Learning
 - Difficult Dialogues Initiative
- Add a question to the standard course evaluation form that measures how well a professor or teaching assistant fosters a responsible and free exchange of ideas in the classroom.
- With the help of the Office of University Counsel, the Chancellor could draft a letter to conservative students explaining that their rights are protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and under "creed" in the University's policy on nondiscrimination.
- Engage the Chair of the Faculty and the Faculty Council to help address these issues.

Appendix B. Representative Listing of Campus Y Committees

Students for the Advancement of Race Relations (SARR) strives to facilitate communication and understanding across racial lines and to bring racial issues to the fore by fostering constructive, provocative discourse. SARR holds events with other student organizations throughout the year, with a main focus on Race Relations Week. Events include lectures, discussions and less-formal events like meals. SARR partners with other student organizations with compatible interests to broaden their appeal. For instance, in 2006 they partnered with the campus branch of NAACP, and Intersarsity to have NC NAACP President Dr. William Barber speak to 350 white, black, conservative and liberal students.

Table Talk is another committee of the Campus Y which focus on partnering with other student organizations on to hold discussions and presentations throughout the year. The events attempt to start a conversation in the and amongst the people who attend. They generally focus on issues that our most salient based on current events or pressing issues. Last year, Table Talk partnered with some of the Israel/Palestine groups to talk about the Middle East. The event included a speech by a grad student who was a Jew who lived in Palestine, an academic (Sarah Shields), an undergraduate Muslim student and a student who had studied abroad in the region. It was attended by over 140 people.

Other Campus Y groups include Advocates for Human rights (AHR), Best Buddies, Big Buddy, Catalyst Conference, Criminal Justice Action and Awareness, Fighting Against the Digital Divide (FADD), Freshman Camp, Health Focus Helping Paws, Helping youth by Providing Enrichment (HYPE), Hunger and Homelessness Outreach Project (HOPE), Linking Immigrants to New Communities (LINC), Nourish International, Project Literacy, and Youth Elderly Service.

Appendix C. Survey of Students on Classroom Environment

This is a five-minute survey from the Chancellor's Task Force on Academic Responsibility.

The classroom environment at the University of North Carolina should be one where students and faculty are encouraged to express provocative perspectives and have their ideas examined in a rigorous, academic manner without fear of being ridiculed, belittled, or marked down for introducing those ideas. **Academic Responsibility** is a two-way street in which faculty and students both have responsibilities, as described in the draft report from the Student Advisory Committee to the Chancellor ([Report on Academic Responsibility](#)).

In the Spring of 2007, the Chancellor appointed the Task Force on Academic Responsibility to study the status of academic responsibility on campus and if necessary to make recommendations to improve the environment. The following questions were designed to help the Chancellor's Task Force on Academic Responsibility learn more about the perceptions of students on these academic matters.

Please rate each item based upon the majority of your classroom experiences.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Cannot Rate
1. Instructors at the University generally maintain an atmosphere that promotes intellectual freedom and welcomes diverse perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Teaching assistants at the University generally maintain an atmosphere that promotes intellectual freedom and welcomes diverse perspectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. My classmates create an environment that makes me feel safe being open and honest in expressing my opinions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I perceive the classroom environment at UNC to be open and welcoming to independent and provocative points of view.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. I have experienced situations, or have witnessed situations, in which the classroom environment seemed unwelcoming to or hindered the expression of provocative or unpopular ideas.

- Yes
- No

6. If you answered "yes" to item #5, please provide information on the specific incidents. It is important that you be specific about whether the incident involved faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and/or student peers and that you specify the actions (or failure to act) that inhibited dialogue. Please also include what you did in response to the situation.

7. Please provide any additional comments for the Task Force and include any ideas that you have on how the University can address these issues.



Demographics

Degree Level:

- Undergraduate
- Graduate/Professional

If undergraduate:

- First Year
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

How would you characterize your political views?

- Far left
- Liberal
- Middle-of-the-road
- Conservative
- Far right

Optional: To enter the drawing for one of the prizes, please provide an e-mail address or phone number where you can be contacted if you are a winner. Contact information will be permanently separated from your survey responses to protect your anonymity.



Thank you for completing this survey. Please use the button below to submit your responses.

Submit