

The Center for European Studies denounces the decision by the Board of Trustees at the University of North Carolina to deny Nikole Hannah-Jones tenure in the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media. A distinguished alumna of UNC, Hannah-Jones earned a Pulitzer Prize for her outstanding journalism and was recognized with a MacArthur “genius” fellowship. She co-founded the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting, dedicated to increasing the ranks of investigative reporters of color. Yet despite the recommendation of professors at UNC’s School of Journalism, the university tenure and promotion committee, faculty consulted outside the university, and the University’s dean and provost, the Board of Trustees (BOT) failed to consider her case for tenure. Along with a wide range of other faculty members, students, and alumni, inside and outside of UNC, we object to the interference in academic freedom and self-governance exhibited in this case. Faculty and academic administrators must govern the tenure process if academic integrity is to be upheld.

We believe that this decision makes a mockery of the University’s strategic plan to promote faculty diversity and inclusive excellence at UNC-Chapel Hill. Decisions such as this harm the University’s reputation throughout all academic disciplines. They also raise questions about whether the University can be a welcoming place to have difficult conversations about race and history. This decision of the BOT has already led to the departure of a number of minority faculty members and to the decision of others not to accept UNC’s employment offer. Two of the CES Advisory Board members are people of color and we fear that it will be harder to keep them when they again have outside offers.

While it is clear that the BOT actions hinder the achievement of UNC’s strategic plan to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, the damage goes further than harming diversity on the UNC faculty. It will be harder to recruit faculty at all levels but particularly at the untenured, tenure track level. They will surely have second thoughts about accepting a position at a university at which they have to not only jump over all of the academic hurdles to get tenure but also have to pass political litmus tests. It is no exaggeration to say that the BOT’s action on this matter, if not reversed, threatens the work of generations of faculty, staff, students, and alumni to establish UNC as one of the premier universities in the United States and the world.