

Resolution 2016-4. On Supporting and Sustaining LGBTQ Academic Initiatives

The Faculty Council resolves:

With reference to the actions and comments of President-Designate Margaret Spellings on the use of public funding for LGBTQ initiatives, it is the sense of the Faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill that the President and Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina should uphold their responsibilities to all of the university's students, staff, and faculty by fiscally supporting and sustaining LGBTQ academic initiatives in a fully equitable and non-prejudicial manner.

Submitted by: Richard C. Cante (Communication), Ruth Salvaggio (English & Comparative Literature), Neel Ahuja (English & Comparative Literature), Florence E. Babb (Anthropology), Susan Bickford (Political Science), Karen Booth (Women's & Gender Studies), Gabrielle Calvocoressi (English & Comparative Literature), Pamela Johnston Conover (Political Science), Tyler Curtain (English & Comparative Literature), María DeGuzmán (English & Comparative Literature), Maxine Eichner (Law), Barbara Fedders (Law), Dominique Fisher (Romance Studies), Minrose Gwin (English & Comparative Literature), Carolyn Tucker Halpern (Maternal & Child Health), Juliane Hammer (Religious Studies), Sharon Holland (American Studies), Randall Kenan (English & Comparative Literature), Sherryl Kleinman (Sociology), Holning Lau (Law), Cary Levine (Art), Paul Necochea (History), Christopher Putney (Germanic & Slavic Languages & Literatures), Andrew Reynolds (Political Science), Michelle Robinson (American Studies), Victor Schoenbach (Epidemiology), Yaron Shemer (Asian Studies), elin o'Hara slavick (Art), Randall Styers (Religious Studies), Jessica Tanner (Romance Studies), Wendy Weber (English & Comparative Literature), and Andrew Whittemore (City & Regional Planning).

Comment:

As faculty affiliated with the Program in Sexuality Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill, we express our deep concern about the appointment of Margaret Spellings as President of the UNC system. We request that Ms. Spellings clarify her position on the use of public funds for LGBTQ-related academic content and institutional initiatives throughout the university system.

National media have broadly covered Ms. Spellings' 2005 request that PBS refund taxpayer dollars that had been used to produce a television program featuring same-sex parents. After the announcement of her appointment as UNC President on October 23, 2015, Ms. Spellings was asked to comment on this matter. Her reply that day has also been widely reported. Our own Daily Tar Heel filed this account: "Have her views on the LGBTQ community changed since 2005, when she voiced her displeasure with an animated children's show that portrayed lesbian couples? 'I can't comment on those lifestyles,' she said, noting her issue was with the use of public funds to pay for the PBS

television program.” (DTH, 10/23/2015)

In responding to this statement, several UNC professors, students, and alums publicly explained why they found Ms. Spellings’ use of the term “lifestyles” offensive and insulting. A number of other commentators objected just as strongly, for national media audiences. At the very least, Ms. Spellings’ use of the word “lifestyles” was unfortunate because it signaled the kind of denigration that so many LGBTQ people have historically encountered. But aside from that, it is Ms. Spellings’ stated inability to comment, or unwillingness to comment, that has troubled many faculty and necessitates this resolution. We take it as our responsibility as faculty to state the need for, and importance of, further comment from Ms. Spellings about LGBTQ support at UNC and, in particular, about funding for LGBTQ-related research, teaching, and learning.

UNC-CH leadership recently posted this statement on the UNC-CH website: “It is our belief that we have an opportunity to highlight and reinvigorate our efforts to address the issues and gaps that keep anyone from feeling a complete sense of equality and belonging at Carolina.” The signatories of this resolution want to know whether or not this hope for a “complete sense of equality and belonging” extends both to LGBTQ communities and to everyone engaged in the study of LGBTQ issues at Carolina. At least since October 23, this has been officially and disturbingly unclear. While the university is in the midst of important attempts to address appropriately the inclusion and support of varied and diverse populations, we call upon Ms. Spellings to reassure LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty by stating her support for LGBTQ communities and the study of LGBTQ issues at UNC.

Such clarification and such support are the least we must ask of the university’s leaders. Our entire academic community is committed to UNC-CH’s Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination. This statement includes, as bases on which the university does not discriminate, "gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information" as well as "sex" and "sexual orientation." We have worked hard over many years, along with many of you and countless other people, to establish and foster more welcoming academic climates on the Chapel Hill campus.

We have sought to implement this non-discrimination policy by developing and nurturing initiatives to address more fully the needs of the LGBTQ population, which is itself made up of diverse constituencies. The Program in Sexuality Studies and the Provost’s Committee on LGBTQ Life have stood as two excellent examples of this collective work for more than a decade, and the LGBTQ Representation and Rights Research Initiative as another since 2012.

The appointment of Ms. Spellings, together with her October 23 refusal to clarify her position on LGBTQ support, could be taken as indicative of efforts not only to halt such progress, but even actively to reverse that progress. Therefore, we ask for confirmation that Ms. Spellings will uphold her new position’s responsibilities to all of the university’s students, staff, and faculty by fiscally supporting and sustaining LGBTQ academic initiatives in a fully equitable and non- prejudicial manner.

We believe that adoption of this resolution by the Faculty Council is necessary to confirm compliance with university policies and to assure that public funding is administered without discrimination. Furthermore, some of us proudly join in submitting this resolution also as LGBTQ individuals who continue to contend, along with our students, with the distinct legacies that we have inherited of institutionalized discrimination and marginalization. The Council's support will confirm that our lives, and our contributions to this university, are indeed worthy of comment and recognition.

Diminishing any of us only serves to diminish the university as a whole. Supporting us now will show that we are all, in fact, committed to a "complete sense of equality and belonging" in our university system.