



June 24, 2021

To the Board of Trustees:

We, the undersigned members of the Department of Computer Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, are writing to express our strongest condemnation of the Board of Trustees' recent decision not to review Nikole Hannah-Jones' tenure case, effectively denying her tenure. We call on the Board to take immediate corrective action by reviewing Ms. Hannah-Jones' tenure case in an open and transparent manner.

We are proud to be part of the UNC-CH community, and we embrace its core values of academic freedom, scientific inquiry, and freedom of speech. These values have led us to explore new directions, establish new technologies, and produce cutting-edge research. However, we are deeply saddened by the Board's action, which we believe is in direct conflict with these values. Ms. Hannah-Jones's tenure case has been reviewed and enthusiastically endorsed by external scholars, the faculty of the UNC-CH School of Journalism and Media, and UNC-CH administration. By failing to review the tenure case without providing any good-faith reason for this action, the Board has inserted itself into the academic affairs of the University, putting the academic integrity of UNC-CH and the UNC system in jeopardy and the future of our scholarship at risk.

It would be beyond disingenuous to pretend that race does not play a role in this case. Nikole Hannah-Jones is a Black scholar whose research revisits the history of our nation's founding, insisting that the full story of slavery, race, and racism in the United States has not yet been told. She has received the highest possible recognition for her work from the scholars in her field, winning both the Pulitzer Prize and MacArthur "Genius" Grant. She has also received the strongest possible support for her tenure case from her academic peers. It is difficult to imagine a situation in which the Board would not rush to offer tenure to a white scholar whose work had earned such profound and widespread acclaim.

If the Board of Trustees finds no other argument compelling, we urge it to consider the following example of the effects of its actions. The decision to effectively deny Ms. Hannah-Jones tenure has cost the Department of Computer Science crucial funding in the form of an alumni donation intended to fund a chaired professorship. The potential donor retracted their offer because they "are unwilling to support an institution that denies tenure to a Pulitzer Prize winner for purely political reasons". In this way, the Board's actions have already damaged our ability to attract the strongest candidates to our faculty and graduate program and retain our position as one of the top computer science programs in the country, which can only further damage the University's national and global reputation.

We urge the Board to take up this business in your next meeting on July 14th-15th.

Sincerely,

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