

Statement from the UNC Chairs of Fine Arts and Humanities

The Charter for the University of North Carolina begins, “Whereas in all well regulated Governments, it is the indispensable duty of every Legislature to consult the Happiness of a rising generation and endeavor to fit them for an honourable discharge of the social duties of life, by paying the strictest attention to their education.” Penned in 1789, these words remain the unequivocal charge to the faculty of the University of North Carolina to do the work of education. As knowledge and understanding grow with each “rising generation,” society advances and the full contours of “happiness” and the “social duties of life” evolve.

There is nothing easy about this work. It has its foes. It is complicated and it is messy – but it is, as the Charter’s authors recognized, “indispensable.” It is also the labor of the long game to build a collective good grounded in justice, enfranchisement, equity, and ethics. The Charter’s authors (white males, property owners, and slaveholders all) could not envision a university that looks like UNC today – nor could they grasp the realities and challenges we face. Our university is not theirs, nor will it ever be again. It has greater responsibilities. We imagine a university where social justice is the norm, but never taken for granted.

Recent and extraordinary events surrounding the Board of Governor’s deposition of the Confederate memorial “Silent Sam” and the levy of a \$2.5 million “fine” on the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to finance the continued abuse of our core mission cannot go unanswered. Accordingly, we call upon our campus leaders to commit themselves to the long arc of realizing social justice through education by the creation of an endowment in the amount of \$10 million that will underwrite teaching the histories of enslavement, discrimination, and social justice movements as they unfolded and continue to unfold on our campus and in our community as well as support scholarships and programs for historically marginalized peoples and communities. It is only through direct and sustained engagement with our students, and “strictest attention to their education” that we can meet our Charter’s call to teach each “rising generation” the “social duties of life.” We can do nothing less.

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