

MINUTES  
MEETING OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON EQUALITY POLICY  
APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Thursday, August 7, 2025  
4:00 pm  
Virtual Meeting via Zoom and Conference Call

CALL TO ORDER: The Board of Trustees of Appalachian State University Subcommittee on Equality Policy met at the call of the Chair on Thursday, August 7, at 4:00 p.m. Chair Mark E. Ricks presided and called the meeting to order.

MEMBERS PRESENT VIA ZOOM: Anita B. Greene  
James E. Harris  
Mark E. Ricks  
R. Thomas Sofield  
Steven D. Wyatt

OTHERS PRESENT: Dawn Antonucci  
Kristen Bonatz  
JJ Brown  
David Cook  
Megan Hayes  
Heather Norris, Chancellor  
Neva Specht

CONFLICT OF INTEREST NOTICE: Chair Ricks read the following statement:

"Under the State Government Ethics Act, all voting members of the Board of Trustees have a duty to avoid conflicts of interest and appearances of conflicts. Looking at the agenda for today's meeting, does anyone know that you have a conflict of interest or an interest that would give rise to the appearance of a conflict of interest? If so, please let me know now."

None Reported.

ROLL CALL: Chair Ricks asked David Cook to call roll. Mr. Cook completed the roll call confirming there was a quorum present.

REMARKS FROM CHANCELLOR NORRIS: Dr. Norris briefed the committee on campus operations related to UNC System Equality Policy Compliance and Certification. Refer to Attachment 1 for full remarks.

CLOSED SESSION: Chair Ricks made a motion for the Board to convene in closed session. There being a second by Trustee Wyatt, Chair Ricks asked that everyone be excused with the exception of the Trustees and staff necessary to support the meeting.

Chair Ricks stated the public phone line would be closed as the Board convenes in closed session and once the Board returns to open session, the phone line will resume.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, the Board convened in closed session to:  
consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee in accordance with N.C.G.S § 143-318.11(a)(6).

OPEN SESSION RECONVENED: Upon motion made by Trustee Wyatt and seconded by Trustee Sofield, the Board reconvened in open session at 4:31 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:32 p.m.

Mark E. Ricks, Chair

By:

  
David Cook  
Assistant Secretary

## ATTACHMENT 1

### **Chancellor Remarks from August 7, 2025 Meeting of the Subcommittee on Equality Policy Appalachian State University Board of Trustees**

Good afternoon and thank you for serving on this important subcommittee.

You may recall that Board of Governors Chair Wendy Murphy sent a directive to the Boards of Trustees of each UNC System institution asking for the establishment of this subcommittee, and briefings from Chancellors on compliance measures with UNC System Policy 300.8.5, titled Equality Within the University of North Carolina. Today, I'll provide you with a briefing of our university's compliance with these measures.

On May 23, 2024, the UNC System Board of Governors voted to repeal and replace Policy 300.8.5 in the UNC Policy Manual, which was called the Policy on Diversity and Inclusion Within the University of North Carolina, and adopted a new policy, titled Equality Within the University of North Carolina.

Each university was charged with certifying — by Sept. 1, 2024, and on or before Sept. 1 annually thereafter — full compliance with the commitment to institutional neutrality and nondiscrimination required by law and this policy. A few highlights from the policy are here on this slide.

It's important to note the commitment to equality of all persons and the emphasis on the success of ALL of our students. I'll now walk you through a timeline of relevant policy and law:

2017:

- North Carolina General Assembly adopts G.S. 116-300 "Campus Free Speech"; amended in 2023

2019:

- Board of Governors adopts Policy 300.8.5 and President adopts Regulation 300.8.5[R] "Regulation on Diversity and Inclusion Within the University of North Carolina" requiring reporting by a senior leader on diversity efforts by all constituent institutions

2023:

- Board of Governors amends Policy 300.5.1 "Political Activities of Employees" to include "Prohibition on Compelling Speech"
- March 17, 2023: System Office Legal Affairs issues additional guidance regarding Policy 300.5.1

- North Carolina General Assembly enacts G.S. 126-14.5 and 126-14.6 “Prohibit State Government from Compelling Certain forms of Employee Speech,” which introduces “Prohibited Training Concepts”
- June 23, 2023: Board of Trustees passes “Resolution on the Affirmation of Freedom of Speech at Appalachian State University”

2024:

- Board of Governors repeals the 2019 Policy and Regulation (300.8.5) “Regulation on Diversity and Inclusion Within the University of North Carolina” and replaces with a new Policy 300.8.5 “Equality Within the University of North Carolina”
- June 28, 2024: System Office Legal Affairs issues additional guidance
- August 30, 2024: Interim Chancellor Norris and Vice Chancellor Brown certified and reported that Appalachian State University is in compliance

2025:

- President Trump issues Executive Orders
- February 5: UNC System Memorandum regarding Curriculum
- February 14: US Department of Education “Dear Colleague Letter”
- March-May: Curricular certifications provided to UNC System Office
- July 29: “Guidance for Recipients of Federal Funding Regarding Unlawful Discrimination”
- Syllabus guidance

It’s been important, throughout this process, for me to share my commitment to ensuring ALL students are successful. Here’s one statement from April of last year that I shared in my university message emphasizing my commitment to student success.

Regular and broad communication has been key to ensuring that our university community not only understands the policy, but also understands how to comply with the policy. In July of last year, we created a website sharing the policy, information about it, and what it means for our university.

This site is regularly updated — most recently, as you can see, last month — and it includes links to many communications and resources — including a link to this Board’s June 2023 resolution on the affirmation of freedom of speech at Appalachian State University.

In addition to sharing these compliance initiatives, as also directed by Chair Murphy, I’m sharing information about a review of staff positions that were in compliance with the previous policy, and our actions to ensure all positions are in compliance with the new policy. During our position review, we identified these positions that needed attention.

Chair Ricks, this concludes the open session portion of my report.

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